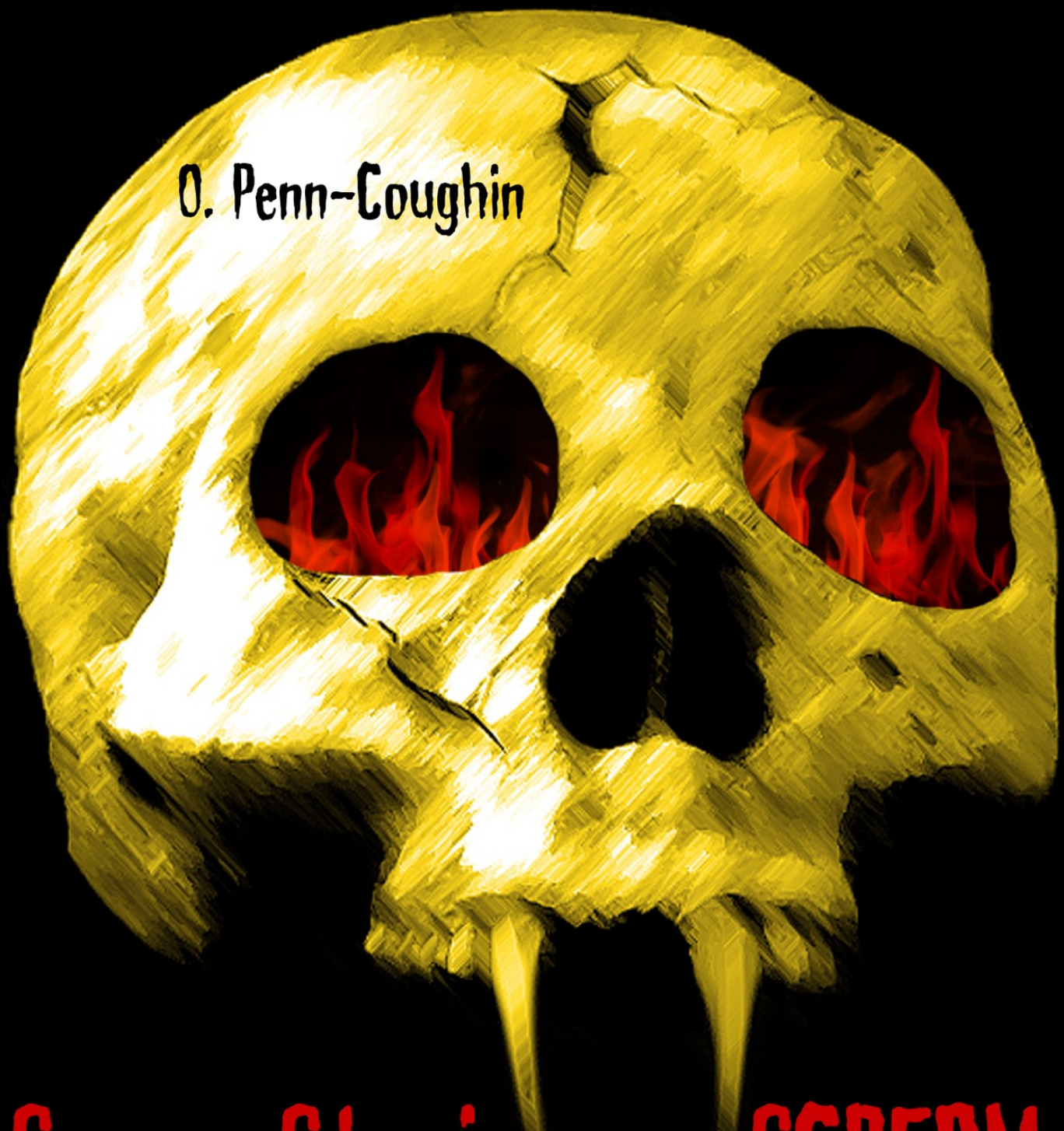
They're Coming For You 5

O. Penn-Coughin



Scary Stories that SCREAM to be Read... Campfire Edition

They're Coming For You 5

Scary Stories that Scream to be Read… Campfire Edition

by

O. Penn-Coughin

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These stories are meant to make you laugh, jump, and keep you up at night. They can be read around the campfire, on a sleepover, or any old time, alone or with family and friends.
Instructions **[like this]** are included for extra fun.
Whatever you do, don't take this book too seriously. People sometimes have a hard time remembering this. I suppose you can't blame them. After all, when you're having a nightmare, it's hard to remember you're having a nightmare.
Speaking of which, if you'd like to hear me read stories from the *They're Coming For You* series, check out **The Scary Story Podcast**.
Pleasant dreams. Or screams.

O.

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Spider Season

"I haven't seen any of 'em around the campsite," Brody said. "Just the same, make sure you shake out your sleeping bag. You don't want one of them hairy things in there with you, laying their eggs or what have you."

"Yeah," Jackson said. "I saw a lot of them on the hike up. Big ones, too. They've been eating all summer and now it's mating season for the little buggers."

Noah shivered. Goose bumps covered his arms.

"That's gross," he said. "I hope I can get to sleep now."

He went inside his tent and unzipped the sleeping bag. He gave it a good thrashing, spreading the super sweaty sock smell all around.

"There," he said, crawling inside.

It was cold, cold enough he could see his breath.

He listened to his iPod in the dark for a while and started to drift off to sleep.

Brody and Jackson were already snoring in the other tent a few feet away.

During the night, Noah had a terrible dream. Something large and hairy crawled over his face and disappeared into his ear. A moment later he heard humming. It was a very familiar tune, but he couldn't place it.

Then a strange inhuman voice spoke.

"I like you," it said. "I like you *a lot*."

Noah woke up screaming. His head felt like it was wrapped in cotton candy. He ran outside and called to his friends.

"Jackson! Brody! Brody!"

There was an odd sound coming from the other tent.

Noah went over, unzipped the door, and looked inside. Then he started screaming again. Two giant spiders were inside, each chewing on something bloody. Then Noah saw that Brody and Jackson were missing *their heads*!

Noah heard the music again. This time he recognized the song. It was *Here Comes the Bride*. At that moment, something touched his shoulder. When he turned around, he saw an enormous black spider dressed all in white. It was licking its lips. Noah fainted.

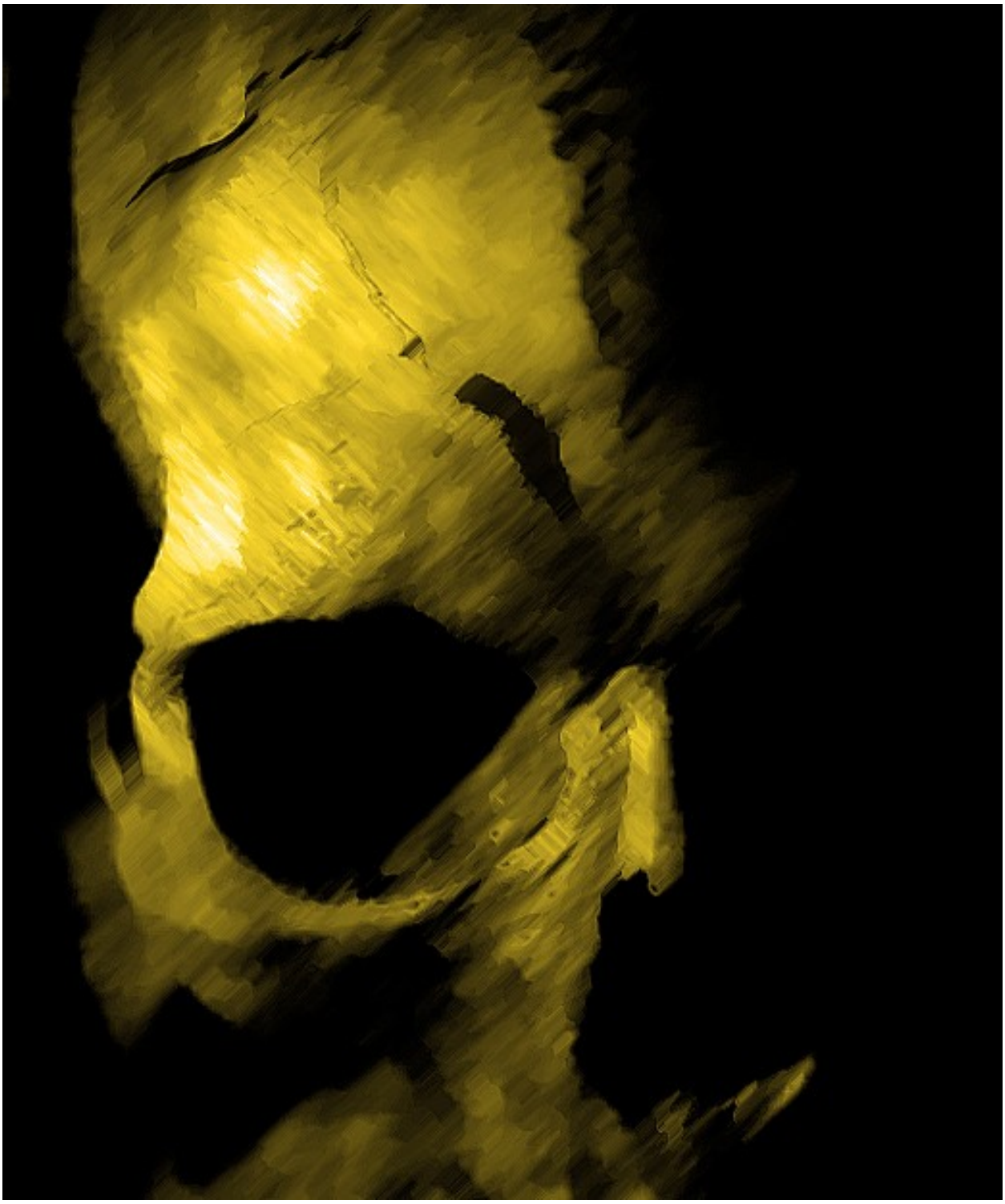
When Noah woke up the next morning, everything was fine. Outside he could hear birds chirping and Jackson and Brody as they went about their morning chores.

It had been a nightmare, just a crazy dream. Everything was fine. Everything was fine.

But one morning a few weeks after the camping trip, Noah felt strange. He sat in his chair in front of the TV and stared at the blank screen. He sat there all day. After a time his eyes clouded over and at some point he stopped moving.

Then his head fell off.

A moment later, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of spiders crawled out.



Shadow Dance

The dream is always the same. I'm running through the woods at night. Crashing through the bramble. Running blind. Running, bark and branches cutting into me. Running.

At first I can't see what I'm running from. I just know it's something horrible. But then through my mind's eye I can see it as the moon comes through an opening in the treetops.

I'm running from my own shadow.

No, you mustn't. Don't. Stop. Don't laugh. It will hear you. It's no laughing matter.

You see, my shadow has turned dark and evil.

It does things behind my back. Terrible things. What happened to Sparky was no accident. That canoe didn't just drift off by itself. It was tied and secured. I had made sure of it. When the canoe was swept into the rapids it was only a matter of time before it capsized. And when it did and the little dog disappeared under the waves, I could have sworn I heard laughter coming from behind me. From right behind me. Demonic laughter.

When I turned around it acted normal, of course—as it always does—looking back like me. As if to say, "What? What? What are we looking at?"

But I know. I can feel it. It waits. It waits in the dark. When I'm not looking. When it can sneak off and lose itself among all the other shadows of the night.

The dream always ends the same. I wake up by a fire in the forest. A fire like this one. There are others with me. And I can see my shadow dancing in the trees to the rhythm of the flames and the beating of its own black heart. It smiles and winks at me. I know what it has in mind. But I am too far gone with fear and fatigue and foreshadowing. I yawn and rub my head and it senses its power growing as my eyes become slits. Sleep will take me soon. And then it will be free. I won't be able to stop it.

In the morning, they'll all be dead.

In the morning, *you'll* all be dead.

AAAAH!

Teddy

His name was Teddy.
I saw him at the park.
He seemed like just another kid.
We played on the see-saw.
We went down the slide.
We played hide and seek
with my head.
How was I to know Teddy
had just escaped from a mental hospital.

Clown Kiss

Reggie woke from a terrible nightmare.

A fat, sweaty clown had ahold of him by the arm. Reggie struggled and fought but the clown just pulled him closer and closer. Reggie could smell its stale popcorn cigarette breath. The big red plastic nose grew larger and larger.

"Ever been kissed by a clown, boy?" the clown cackled. "It's like being bitten by a vampire—except you turn into a clown. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha…"

A moment later Reggie could feel the clown's thick red lips pressing against his own.

He woke up screaming and spitting.

Funny how those little kid fears never quite leave, Reggie thought after a while.

"Yeah, real funny," he sighed.

He knew it had been a dream.

Still, he cringed before looking in the mirror, half expecting to a see a clown staring back at him.

No, it was just him. A little tired, a little older, but him. Too old to be dreaming about such nonsense.

Reggie blew out a long sigh anyway.

As he walked down the hall he stumbled and fell into the wall. He felt dizzy and strange.

When he reached the kitchen, his sister started screaming and pointing at him. He could see the terror in her face but he didn't care. He seemed to be enjoying it really. And at that moment he began to understand: it had not been a dream.

He caught a glimpse of his reflection in the window over the sink. A clown was looking back at him. It smiled. Reggie looked down at his big, red clown shoes and smiled, too.

He started walking toward his sister.

[Now scream like a little girl, a little girl who will soon be joining… *the circus*.]

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha…"

AAAAH!

The Pen

Gavin never really knew his grandfather. He was old and just sat in a wheelchair and said nothing and smelled bad. And now the old man was dead.

No one cried at the funeral. His grandfather left Gavin a pen. Gavin didn't see it as a fair trade, having to miss school and sit in the car for the long drive to the cemetery and wear a suit and tie and uncomfortable shoes in exchange for some lame pen.

"I remember Dad got that pen somewhere in Africa," his aunt said. "There's supposed to be a story behind it."

But no one seemed to know the story.

The pen was in an old leather case.

Gavin was so bored at the wake that he started looking at the pen. He unzipped the case and a folded piece of paper fell to the floor. Gavin picked it up and opened it.

"Wishes come true," it read. "Begin by writing them down."

Thinking of nothing better to do, Gavin turned over the paper and took the pen in his hand.

Get me out of here, he wrote.

"Hey, sport, get your coat," his dad said a moment later. "It's time to go."

"That was pretty cool," Gavin said to himself, but he wrote it off to coincidence.

On the car ride home, Gavin got hungry. He took out the pen and scribbled down two words: *ice cream*.

"Bill, let's stop at *Frozen Freddie's*," his mom said. "I've been dying to try that new flavor."

Gavin was speechless. A few minutes later, he was happily licking away on an ice cream cone.

The next day Gavin took the pen to school.

She can't see me, he wrote during math class.

He played games on his phone the whole period. The teacher walked right by several times and said nothing. Right before recess, Gavin folded a piece of paper into an airplane. While the teacher was writing something on the board, he let it fly. The airplane rose and dipped and rose again and smashed six inches above the teacher's head.

"Now who did that?" she said turning around.

She looked in Gavin's direction and said, "We'll talk about it during recess, Ruben."

"But—" the boy sitting behind Gavin began.

"You can tell me all about it *during recess*," she said.

During recess, Ruben and another student who hadn't finished his work stayed inside.

The teacher was about to talk to Ruben when the phone rang.

"One minute," she said holding up her finger.

"Hey, let's play Hangman," Ruben said to the other boy.

He got out a piece of paper and took the pen from Gavin's desk.

Outside Gavin was playing basketball and dribbling the ball with both hands at the same time.

"You can't do that," another boy said, taking the ball away. "That's double dribble."

"Your mom double dribbles," Gavin said. "I do what I want."

He took the ball back and began bouncing the ball again with two hands.

Back inside the classroom the teacher was still on the phone. The two boys finished their game.

"I win!" Ruben said, completing the stick figure. "The word was *L-O-S-E-R*."

Then he wrote *Gavin* on the paper with an arrow pointing to the hanged man.

Out on the basketball court, Gavin suddenly started having trouble breathing. He fell down by the free throw line. The other children gathered around.

Gavin began to turn blue.

Sleepovers are for Girls

"Sleepovers are for girls," Morton whined.

"I'm sorry, dear," his mom said. "But you can't go camping right now. Not with that killer on the loose."

There had been news stories recently about a killer stalking the local woods. So far, there had been eight victims—all young boys who had either been hiking or camping.

At first the police thought they had all died of natural causes. Death in each case was determined to be the result of heart failure. And although traces of an unidentifiable substance were found on the victims' lips, there wasn't a mark on any of the bodies.

But then a local psychic was brought in. She studied the crime scene photos and claimed she could *see* the ghost of a girl hovering over the boys' bodies and smiling.

"All right," Morton said and sighed. "But can't we call it something else?"

"How about an *Indoor Campout*?" his mom said. "You and your friends can set up tents down in the basement and Dad can grill some burgers and hotdogs. It'll be loads of fun and I don't think anyone will miss the bug bites."

"Okay, that actually sounds pretty good," Morton said.

Morton's mom was right. He and his friends had a great time that night.

"Can I get anyone anymore hot chocolate before going to bed?" she said. "Oh, and don't forget to brush your teeth."

A few minutes later Morton headed to the bathroom. Someone's business still lingered thick in the air. Morton opened the window over the toilet and felt a warm breeze blow in. He began brushing his teeth and silver braces.

He was almost finished when he felt the air grow strangely cold. Suddenly he could see his breath.

Then in the mirror he saw a girl standing behind him.

"Hey, no girls," Morton said, turning around. "This party's just for bo—"

And then he stopped.

This was no ordinary girl. Morton knew at that moment that she had to be the ghost that had killed those other boys.

Nothing about her dress or hair gave it away. Most of her face, too, was rather average. It was all in the eyes.

She didn't have any.

There were two deep, dark holes where they should have been. Their terrible blackness seemed to grow as she floated closer and closer, until they blocked out almost everything else.

Morton wanted to run, he wanted to turn away or at least squeeze his eyes shut. But he couldn't. He was powerless to do anything except stare into those horrible holes.

And then the girl spoke.

"Kiss me," she moaned. "Kiss meeeeee…"

She pursed her lips as she put her hand on Morton's forearm.

Then the lights flickered and went out.

A moment later Morton felt something hideous touch his lips. His screams never made it out of his mouth.

Morton couldn't breathe. It felt like someone was squeezing all the air out of his chest. A terrible pain then exploded under Morton's breastbone. A second later his heart stopped.

The girl smiled and held Morton's dead body in her embrace for a time before letting it fall to the floor.

"Kiss me," she moaned softly. "Kiss meeeeee…"

[Now pucker up and reach out toward someone as if you're going to kiss them.]

The Marshmallows Started Screaming

The marshmallows started screaming.
Wouldn't you?
AAAAH!

Snap

There I was, going in all alone with only the keeper to beat, when I got taken down from behind.

"Wow," she said. "And you were so close."

I listened for the whistle, looked around for the ref, certain not only that I would be awarded a penalty kick but that she would earn a red card.

But all I saw was that the ball was still in play with the action going down the other way.

And I saw her.

She hovered over me and smiled an evil smile.

I got up and drove my shoulder into her chest as I ran up the field. She just laughed.

"What was *that*?" I said to the ref. "How was that not a red card, dragged down from behind in the box?"

"First, I don't like your tone," he said. "And second, there was no one around you when you went down."

He must have been blind or paid off was my only thought. But then I looked over at our sideline. No one was arguing. Everything was going along as if nothing had happened.

The hell with it, I thought. *Move past it*.

A few minutes later I found a spot, a safe distance from the last defender, and waved for the ball. One of our midfielders saw me, sending the ball my way. I pushed the pass with the outside of my left foot around the defender and headed in on goal.

I heard the whistle blow. Their goalkeeper didn't even try to stop me. I saw that the linesman had his flag up.

"No way!" I said. "No way was I offside."

"I must admit I can't believe it myself," she said.

She smiled again. Her face was without color, completely pale. Her lips were almost black. If I had been going down a dark alley alone I think I would have found her scary. But I needed to focus.

"You have to be better than the other team," my dad always told me. "And sometimes you have to be better than the referee."

The next time I touched the ball, I made them pay.

I went around three of them, including *Goth Girl*. But then I felt someone grab my hair.

"Not so fast," she said as my head jerked to the side and my eyes filled up with tears.

She yanked me off the ball.

"Hey!" I shouted, but again the ref called nothing.

"I guess he's just letting us play," she said. "And don't you think that's how it oughta be with a game of this magnitude?"

There was a black gleam in her hollow eyes.

"All right, then," I said.

As I trotted by, I thrust my elbow deep into her stomach. Again, she just laughed.

The first half ended without any score.

I finally put one in early in the second half, but it was taken away by another phantom offside call.

"Do you guys buy your white canes at the same place?" I shouted to the ref.

He pulled out a yellow card.

"Not another word," he said.

I had to be careful. This guy was clearly bought off, and I knew he wouldn't hesitate to throw me out. What I couldn't understand was why the coach wasn't backing me up.

The other team scored with about 15 minutes left in the game.

The next ball that came my way found me outnumbered by two defenders. But I went right and then faked left, causing them to run into each other. I drove in on goal alone. The keeper held close to her line. I dribbled in, so that the goal grew huge. I was about to tap the ball into the back of the net when *she* scissor tackled me from my left. She didn't come anywhere near the ball, which rolled harmlessly away.

"Aaah!" I screamed as I went flying.

"I know," she said. "That's gotta hurt."

She reached down to help me up. That lipstick must have rubbed off because her teeth looked black, too, as she smiled over me.

I looked around for the ref, but I knew by now that there would be no call.

Deep in stoppage time, I had one last chance.

I received the ball with my back toward goal, about 20 yards out. She was on me, but I faked right and spun left, using my elbow to separate myself from her. Then, as I was about to drive my foot into the ball, she punched me in the jaw.

She got just enough of me. The ball beat the keeper but nicked the outside of the post before going out of bounds.

That's how it ended.

As the rest of her team celebrated, she stuck her hand out to shake mine.

"Good game," she said. "Too bad someone had to lose."

She chuckled and held her black smile a moment too long.

That's when I lost it. I mean, really lost it.

I pounced on her with all my might. I kicked and clawed and pulled her hair. I gouged her eyes and bit her ear. She didn't even put up a fight. Through it all, she just kept laughing. They started pulling me off, but not before I got in one more attack. I grabbed her head with both hands and twisted hard. I snapped her neck and heard it pop.

"That'll teach you," I said.

That's the end of the story.

I killed her. I killed her and I would do it again.

It was the championship game, after all. I wasn't going to take any prisoners.

They have me in this padded cell now. I'm wearing a white jacket with long sleeves tied behind me.

I confessed several times, but they keep trying to convince me I didn't kill anyone.

"What are you talking about?" the doctor says. "Who did you kill?"

Number 2, I say.

"I've talked to players, coaches, spectators, and the referee. The other team didn't have a Number 2," he says. "There was no Number 2. You didn't kill anyone. And if you killed someone, where did the body go? All anyone saw was you, alone on the ground, kicking and punching and screaming. Some people thought they heard you laughing, too. They said you were acting odd the entire game."

He even shows me a doctored video to prove it. All trace of her has been removed, of course.

“You know, sometimes people have strange reactions to stress,” he says over and over again. “I’d like to help you get better.”

He’s a liar. I know he’s trying to trick me. The lies spill from him. They’re all in on it, trying to confuse me, get me to slip up. I’m not sure what their game is. What reason they would have to get to believe I imagined the whole thing? But they don’t worry me.

What has me troubled is why I still hear her laughing. I know that would be impossible.

She visits me at night sometimes, too. She stands in the corner and tries to crack her neck back in place. Sometimes the popping sound keeps me up. Her evil smile grows with every failed attempt.

But I know she’s not real.

She’s not real because she’s dead.

I killed her.

I killed her.

I killed her.

I killed her.

I killed her.

I killed her…

All the same, there she is again, smiling in the corner.

Pop.

Crack.

Pop.

Crack.

Pop.

AAAAH!

What's His Name

Your fingernails claw too late through the dirt,
The worms just ate your liver for dessert.
You stumble around looking for your head.
You find Smith instead,
Who's also quite dead.
Your brain dismembered,
You can't remember
His first name was Ned.

No Such Thing

Jason and Juan were visiting an old friend.

After a while their conversion turned to the supernatural.

"There's no such thing as ghosts," Ernie said. "That stuff's all fake."

"You're wrong," Jason said. "I've seen them myself."

"Me, too," Juan said.

"What did you see?" Ernie said. "There can be a big difference between what's there and what we think is there."

"Ghosts are as real as you and me," Jason said.

"And me," Juan said.

"I don't think so," Ernie said.

"Well, if you don't believe us," Jason said. "Just look in the mirror."

Ernie went over to Juan's car and slid behind the wheel. When he looked at his reflection in the rearview mirror, his mouth dropped open. He was more mist and fog than skin and bone. He reached out and put his hand through the windshield. Then he floated back to the grass where Jason and Juan were standing.

"Well, I'll be," Ernie said.

"Oh, but you already *are*, my friend," Juan said. "You already are."

"Well, it's getting late," Jason said. "We'll see you, Ernie."

Jason and Juan got into the car and drove away from the cemetery.

Crazy Jerry

The story is told of a man who used to live in this wilderness. They called him Crazy Jerry. He lived in a beat-up, old cabin not far from here. They say he went mad one day. They say he started collecting human bones. They say he would do anything to get them.

Ah, what do *they* know?

[Stare at your audience with wide, crazy eyes and shout:]

AAAAH!

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha…

The story is told.

Papa's Dream Dress

The young girl came down from the attic wearing an orange, vanilla swirl-colored dress.

There was something about it that woke something deep inside the old man.

He stared at it for a long time and it slowly dawned on him that it was the dress his dead wife had worn when they had first met more than 70 years earlier.

He stood up with the help of his cane. But something was different. His legs felt steady and strong. Somehow he wasn't an old man anymore. And the girl wasn't a girl. She was his wife.

He reached out a muscular arm and grabbed her around the waist.

Then he began to twirl her around the room.

Round and round they went.

And round and round some more.

Faster and faster.

She laughed and the room began to blur and then became a blur. The air grew hot, almost too hot to touch. And still they spun. Round and round. Faster and faster.

And then the very air exploded like thunder.

The girl went flying against the wall.

When she picked herself up and looked back, the old man was gone.

There was only a pile of smoking ashes in the middle of the floor.

Dead Johnson Falls

The river water was dark, almost black. Mysterious swirls and countercurrents appeared and disappeared while eddies hugged the shores. The water flowed gently but in the distance, a large waterfall spit up spray. It got louder and louder with every paddle stroke.

Joe started making his way toward the takeout on river right.

Suddenly he saw something white rise through the dark water and then pass under the kayak. An instant later a loud crash came from the bottom of the boat. Joe looked down and saw water pouring in through a large hole in the plastic hull.

And then, to his complete and utter horror, he saw a skull, a human skull, bob up between his legs. Joe sat frozen in horror. The head floated on the water's surface for a few seconds and then turned and faced Joe. If it still had eyes, it would have been looking right at him. When it opened its mouth as if to speak, Joe began screaming.

The screams cut through the night and woke the other scouts.

"Wake up, Joe," Darren said, shaking his friend. "Wake up."

Joe sat up, breathing hard. He was covered in sweat.

A moment later Darryl, the scout leader, poked his head in the tent.

"You two doin' all right in here?" he said.

"Yeah, Joe was just having a bad dream," Darren said.

"I keep telling you ladies," Darryl said. "If you can't handle the scary stories, just go inside your tent and listen to your iPutz or whatever it's called."

Joe could only nod and smile weakly.

Since the trip had started, the boys had been trying to top one another as they sat around the campfire at night telling scary stories. Most of the stories were pretty lame, but they were fun just the same. But now Joe felt dumb for having let one of the lamest into his dreams.

A few hours earlier, Dewey had told them one he called *Jumping Jehosaphat.*

"A long time ago, a trapper named Johnson was rafting down this river," Dewey began. "He stopped at an Indian village a few miles upriver from here. They told him what to expect from the river ahead. They said not to camp in the lands between the village and the waterfall. They said it was a sacred burial ground. They said to start early and paddle hard and to pull off near the giant oak tree on the right when the river got loud. They said—"

"Seems like they said a lot of stuff," Joe said and chuckled.

"Yeah, well, they did," Dewey said. "Now let me continue."

"Go 39999939'head on," Joe said.

"Anyway, Johnson had too much whiskey the night before and he didn't wake up till the sun was high up in the sky. He had a terrible headache and mostly just floated lazily down the river that day. By the time it started getting dark, he was still far from the giant oak tree, so he decided to make camp for the night. *In the sacred burial ground*."

"Ooooh," Darren said in fake fear. "I think I just stained my shorts."

"Too late," Sam said. "I smelled your stains all day long sitting behind you in the canoe."

"You're a sick liar," Darren said.

They all laughed except for Dewey, who waited patiently until it was quiet again.

"Well, the next day Johnson didn't stop at the giant oak tree," Dewey whispered. "For reasons that are still a mystery to this day, he stayed on the river. And plunged right down the middle of that waterfall.

“His body was never found. Some say an angry spirit dragged him down those falls. Some say his lonely, ghostly skeleton is still down there and that it cries out for company on quiet nights.

“‘I just want someone to talk to,’ it whispers. ‘Won’t you please talk to me, me, meeee?’”

After Dewey was quiet for a while, the rest of the boys figured out they had come to the end of the story.

“Oooh, real scary,” Sam said. “I was particularly terrified by the horrible boredom I felt.”

“But why’s it called *Jumping Jehosaphat*?” Dwayne asked. “There’s no one in the story named Jehosaphat and there’s no jumping.”

“BOOO!” Dewey suddenly shouted. “Made *you* jump.”

“Oh, no, you didn’t,” Dwayne said, hoping no one had seen him leave the ground. “That’s just you being stupid.”

“All right,” Darryl said. “Time to call it a night. You all want to be rested for our last day on the river. We’ve got a lot of portaging to look forward to before we get back to civilization.”

The boys moaned and started shuffling off toward their tents.

The next day the scouts packed up their supplies and loaded the kayaks and canoes. They paddled hard and portaged around several dangerous rapids.

“One more portage,” Darryl said late that afternoon. “And you don’t want to miss it. So let’s look alive out there.”

They floated through a few more calm miles and then heard the distant roar of Dead Johnson Falls.

“Keep right,” Darryl called out to the paddlers. “Start bearing right.”

Joe had finally shaken the bad feeling the dream had left behind. His head still hurt from not having gotten enough sleep, but he could tough it out. Like the others, he started paddling toward the right.

That’s when something hit the bottom of his kayak. He looked down and saw a large hole open up in the hull. Water began pouring in. And then something floated to the surface. Something white.

It had to be. It couldn’t be. But it was. It was the skull from the nightmare.

“Please talk to meeee,” it wailed.

Joe began screaming.

In his panic, he threw away his paddle.

“What’s he doing?” Darren said.

“Right!” Darryl shouted. “Keep right!”

Already on shore, the rest of the group joined in.

“C’mon, Joe. This way, buddy! Over here! Over here!”

There was still time for Joe to swim for it. Maybe he could grab hold of a branch or crawl onto a rock ledge.

But it was no use. He was too busy screaming and slapping at the water down between his legs to try to save himself. The kayak just kept drifting farther and farther toward the falls. At one point it spun around so that Joe was facing back upriver.

They could see him batting at something. But they couldn’t make out what. They could see his pale, tortured face contorted in terror.

The water began to pick up speed.

“Do something!” Darren said to Darryl.

But there was nothing to do. They could only watch helplessly as Joe's kayak disappeared behind the mist of Dead Johnson Falls.

"We'll have so much to talk about," the skull said, grinning at Joe as they went over. "Name's Johnson. But I reckon you can call me Dead. Reckon I can call you dead, too."

The skull's wicked laughter was drowned out by the roar of the water.

They found the kayak a few miles downriver.

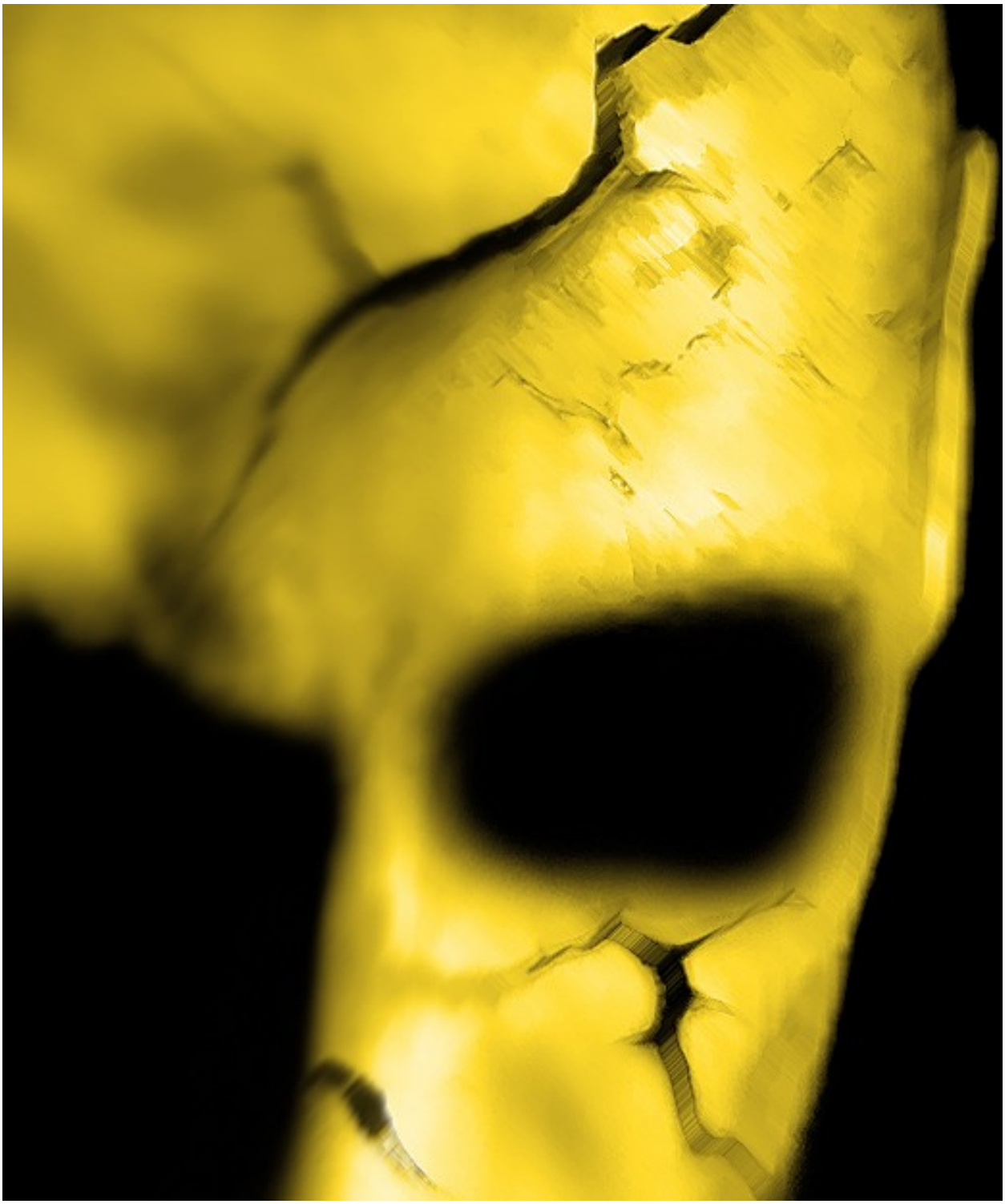
They searched and searched, but Joe's body was never found.

That's pretty much the end of the story.

Except that some say the two ghost skeletons can be heard talking during quiet nights.

Listen. I think I hear them now. Why, yes. I believe I hear them calling your name.

[Whisper the name of someone in the audience three times. Add a scream at the end if necessary.]



Ruth and Johnny, Again

Ruth and Johnny went car camping.
The sun went down.
Ruth heard a noise.
Johnny said, “I think it’s a clown.”
Ruth said, “Or it could be a bear.”
John drove the hell out of there.

The Return of the Clown from Down Under

The old, rickety rollercoaster kept climbing through the darkness. Up, up, up. It finally reached the top and paused for what seemed like an eternity. Elmer could smell sulfur. He heard an evil chuckle coming from behind him. He turned and saw the familiar face, smiling hideously from ear to ear. Its eyes glowing red, the clown began laughing in Spanish.

Ja, ja, ja.

Elmer tried to stand, but a hand pulled him down.

"Where do you think you're going?" the clown whispered in his ear. "The fun is just beginning."

The rollercoaster began its decent. Down, down, down it dropped. Faster and faster it plunged toward the ocean of fire far below. Elmer closed his eyes.

His shoes suddenly felt hot. Something was burning. Elmer looked down and saw that his legs were on fire. The flames grew higher and higher, reaching his…

Aaaah!

"You all right, man?" his roommate called from across the dark dorm room.

"Just a dream," Elmer said, breathing hard. "Sorry if I woke you."

But as he stared up at the ceiling, trying to convince himself otherwise, Elmer knew it had been more than a dream. The clown was back. He was sure of it. He could feel it all around.

It had been 10 years since he had seen the clown. Since it had melted and disappeared into the gym floor at his elementary school. Since it had said: "I'll be waiting for you down there, my little *vato*."

Elmer had kept the promise he made to himself that day. He had been good. But now the clown was back.

The next night Elmer woke to the sound of circus music coming from his closet. He looked over and saw that his roommate wasn't home yet. The music played slow and distorted, like the batteries were dying. The closet door slowly squeaked open. Elmer half expected to see the huge floppy red shoes.

Instead, a small boy stepped out.

Elmer turned on the light. There was something familiar about the boy, but he couldn't quite place the face. And then it hit him. It was *him*. It was Elmer when he was about eight years old, whn he had last seen the clown.

The circus music stopped. Little Elmer began to speak. But the voice that came out was the voice of the clown.

"Long time no see," it said. "Too long."

"You don't scare me anymore," Elmer said, shaking.

"*Mentiroso*," the clown boy said beginning to fade away. "Liar, liar, pants on fire. Ha, ha, ha, heh, heh, heh…"

Elmer sat there staring past the closet long after the boy had disappeared.

This was no dream, he thought. This was real. It was happening again. It was all happening again.

He finally turned out the light and rested his head on the pillow.

Suddenly a small hand grabbed his wrist in the dark. He could smell the evil as it exploded up his nostrils. Elmer gasped and struggled to free himself. The boy's grip was that of a child and

Elmer broke away, running toward the door. He stood in the open door frame for a moment looking back at the bed.

"Liars have a special place down there in the funhouse," little evil Elmer said and smiled.

Elmer took off down the hall.

The next night Elmer was walking back from the library. He was alone on the path leading to the dorm. As he reached the front of the building, a small figure stepped out of the shadows. Elmer took a step toward it.

"I took care of you once," he said, remembering the holy water-filled balloon he had used to put an end to the clown all those years ago. "I'll take care of you again."

"You took care of nothing, *amigo*," the clown said. "*Nada*."

Elmer clenched his fists.

"But don't sweat it, bro," the voice said. "I'm not here to do you any harm. I just came back to remind you I haven't forgotten. I'm still waiting. We'll have so much fun together. It'll be worth the wait. I'll keep your seat warm. *Bien caliente*."

And with that the boy turned into the clown and then back into the boy. He began laughing in Spanish.

Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja…

He then burst into flames. And then he was gone.

But Elmer knew he would never, never, ever really leave him.

Never.

The Beach

A cold wind blew down the beach. The waves pounded the shore in the dark. The kids huddled around the campfire telling scary stories.

Suddenly the sand beneath them started to move.

A huge hole opened up. First it swallowed the fire. Then it swallowed the children. Then it swallowed itself. Then everything was still again. Everything was as before.

A cold wind blew down the beach. The waves pounded the shore in the dark.

The House

Julia hadn't been back to the old house in 10 years. She had never felt comfortable there. It had given her the creeps for as long as she could remember. But as she got older, it became much more serious than that.

There was the scratching coming from inside the wall behind the headboard. There was the breathing man under her bed. There was the corpse of the little girl floating with her in the tub when she would take a bath.

And there was the certain knowledge that the house wanted her dead.

She had promised herself that when she was old enough—if the house let her live that long—she would leave and never come back. And that's exactly what she did when she turned 18.

But after Julia's parents died, she knew she would have to go back. The house belonged to her now. She didn't want it, of course. She immediately decided she would put it up for sale just as soon as she went through it to see if there was anything worth keeping.

She dreaded having to return and face all the old demons and she had put off going back as long as she could. But her lawyer had told her that this was something that couldn't wait any longer.

Her stomach was in an uproar for days before but as soon as Julia pulled up, she sensed that the house had changed. Where before only weeds had grown, colorful flowers now covered the front yard.

When she walked in, sunlight poured in through the large windows. She remembered the house being much, much darker. Always dark. No matter how many curtains were opened and lights turned on. Always dark. And always cold.

But now there was a warm cheeriness to the place that almost made Julia want to reconsider her decision to sell. It didn't seem so bad. It felt happy. It felt like it had never felt before. It felt like home.

Julia walked up the stairs and into her old bedroom. Somehow she was sure that the old ghosts were gone. She could feel their distance somewhere far beyond the horizon. There would be no more scratching in the wall. No more breathing under the bed. No more dead girl floating in the tub.

"Yes," Julia said, amazed at what was coming out of her mouth. "I'm going to live here. This is my home now."

She felt as happy as the day she had left. But all the emotion had drained her. She suddenly felt dead tired.

She pulled back the covers on the bed, half expecting to find a colony of spiders. Instead the sheets spoke of a fire on a cold night, of hot milk and honey. The pillow whispered her name.

Julia crawled into bed.

Everything was so warm and bright. She closed her eyes. It was all perfect. The old fears melted away and peace engulfed her completely.

She wasn't interested in why the house seemed so different. There was no need for questions. No need for answers. She didn't care. Didn't care. Didn't care…

She didn't care that the house had burned to the ground *13 months earlier*.

She didn't care that the breathing man was waking up—with more than breathing on his mind this time. Didn't care that the dead little girl had turned evil and was stepping out of the bathtub. She didn't care that the charred remains of her dead mother were coming up the stairs.

Didn’t care. Didn’t care.
[Yawn.]
Didn’t c—AAAAH!

The Bones of Lonesome Jones

"All right, rube, just climb up the lava wall, get past the bones of Lonesome Jones, and out the other side," Jake said. "It's really not a big deal—unless you're scared of ghosts."

Frank, of course, was terrified of ghosts. He had never seen one but knew they were real. Knew some were evil, too. Had no idea what he was thinking when he accepted the dare of going into Lonesome Jones Cavern at night.

"I'm not scared of no Lonesome Jones," Frank said, sounding tough. "I ain't no little kid."

"Whatever, fella," Jake said. "Tell us all about it when you come out. I'll meet you on the other side in about 30 minutes."

Frank checked his flashlight. It had a strong lamp but in the blackness of the cave it seemed like it gave off just a tiny pinprick of light. He took a deep, shaky breath. And then another.

All right, he told himself. *Might as well get started.*

He walked, slowly at first, and made it to the lava wall in about a quarter of an hour. The surface of the six-foot tall obstacle was glass smooth. Frank tried to scale the wall several times but only managed to slide back down. There didn't seem to be anything to grab. Nowhere to put his feet.

"How am I supposed to get up this thing?" Frank said, beginning to feel hopeless.

And then he saw the old rope hidden deep in a corner crack where the lava met the wall. A minute later he was up.

The ceiling was lower here and he had to crouch down in spots so as not to hit his head.

He walked about 100 yards and heard something. It sounded like rocks being struck together.

Or were they bones?

"Calm down, calm down," Frank said.

But his heart would have none of it, racing out of all control.

"Hey, Jake, that's not funny," Frank called out. "Cut it out."

And then he saw it.

The white, bony Ghost of Lonesome Jones. Coming toward him.

Frank fainted on the spot.

"What's taking that fool?" Jake said. "It's gettin' cold out here."

A moment later he heard a noise coming from inside the cave.

"Finally," Jake said.

But he didn't see any light.

"Hey, where's your flashlight, fella?"

Frank stepped out of the cave opening without answering.

His face was hidden under his hoodie.

"Well, congratulations, rube," Jake said, sticking out his hand. "I didn't think you had it in you."

Frank reached out his hand.

A moment later Jake felt something grip his fingers. Something strong and bony.

"What the—" he said. "Let go, man."

But Frank didn't listen. He just kept squeezing harder and harder.

Jake reached out his other hand and grabbed Frank by the neck.

The two boys began wrestle dancing in the moonlight.

Jake could feel the bones in his hand cracking as they went round and round.

At some point the hood fell away from Frank's head. Jake could now see what should have been Frank's face. Instead, there was only a skull.

"No!" Jake yelled.

He let go of the thing's bony throat and felt himself grow all weak inside.

The skeleton began dragging Jake into the cave.

"No," Jake whimpered. "Nooo."

The stars blurred overhead. The world went spinning.

And then black.

Let Me In

"Let me in," the tiny voice whispered. "Please let me in."

Sam reached for the flashlight and got out of his sleeping bag. He unzipped the tent door.

It was the same dream he had been having since the trip started.

The small child floated above the ground a few feet away from the tent. It called again.

"Let me in, Sam."

The large black eyes stood out against the bluish white skin of its dead face. Bones poked through in places.

The scene had repeated itself so many times that Sam was no longer scared and had reached the point where he knew even while he was dreaming that it was just a dream.

"You're not real," Sam said. "I'm just having a nightmare."

The little boy started to sob and then began to fade until he completely disappeared.

Sam woke up.

"You're wrong," the boy suddenly said, now next to Sam. "I *am* real."

This was new.

He smelled horrible, as if he had rotted away from the inside. He stretched out his tiny arms toward Sam.

"He is right, Sam," another voice then said. "Just because you have a nightmare about something doesn't mean it's not real."

Sam had no doubt the voice was the soundtrack of evil itself. Just hearing it hurt, like fingernails on a chalkboard. Hot, humid, putrid breath blew over Sam's face and something wet and slimy licked his ear.

His backbone shredded with fear like lettuce for a taco, Sam turned around slowly and saw—AAAAH!

Run

First her left ear turned black.
Then it fell off.
Then the same thing happened to her nose.
Then she came looking for you.

The Creaking Door

The creaking door woke Charlotte in the middle of the night.

It was nothing new.

She always closed it over at night to keep down the TV noises coming from her sister's room. But she stopped short of shutting the door completely because she wanted Mister Jones to be able to come in during the night after he made his rounds around the neighborhood alleys.

"Meow," Mister Jones said loudly, jumping on the bed. "Meeeeow."

"All right, Mister Jones," Charlotte whispered. "Get to sleep."

The cat curled up by her feet.

When the alarm clock went off a few hours later, Charlotte stretched and forced herself to get up. As was usually the case, she had forgotten about the squeaking door.

She shuffled down the hall toward the bathroom. Charlotte looked in the mirror.

What she saw made her gasp in horror.

It was her face. But it wasn't her face. Some*thing* had taken its place. Sagging skin too pale to belong to something living. The eyes were closed as if the thing was dead. And yet, somehow Charlotte could still see, even though she wished she couldn't.

She stood there shaking, trying to wake herself from the nightmare.

But when she looked again the thing was still there. And it had its eyes open.

They were black. Completely black. No whites. Just a solid mass of evil darkness, like pools of putrid sewer water.

And then it opened its mouth. A black tongue passed over the lips several times. It squinted until the eyes were nothing more than slits.

"Tonight," it whispered, fading away. "Tonight, *Charlotte*."

A moment later it was gone and Charlotte's face was back.

Charlotte turned and ran back to her room.

She tried to get her breathing under control.

"That had to be a dream," she said, still shivering. "Had to be."

As the day wore on, Charlotte managed to convince herself that she was right. She reminded herself that she usually had bad dreams when she ate spaghetti sauce too late at night, as she had done the night before.

"Gonna have to stick to Alfredo from now on," she mumbled, driving home from work.

Charlotte had no trouble falling asleep that night. But once again, the creaking of the door woke her.

"Come on up here, Jonesy," she called softly. "Come on."

She reached down in the dark and petted the cat's head. Her fingers touched something wet and sticky.

"Got into another fight, huh?" she said. "Well, I'd hate to see the other guy."

Charlotte closed her eyes and waited to feel the familiar weight leap on the bed.

But nothing happened. Mister Jones didn't jump up and he didn't meow.

Strange, she thought. He's not in here.

"No," a voice suddenly whispered. "But I am."

It was the voice of the face in the mirror. It was the last voice Charlotte would ever hear. Except for her own screams. Her own useless screams.

[Pause. Let them wait for it…]

AAAAH!

Open Window

The old man sat in front of the open window. It was his favorite place. He looked out upon the world and thought his secret thoughts.

His legs didn't work anymore. Neither could he speak or hold a pen. He was trapped inside his mind. But he had the window. It made life worth living.

One hot day in August a cold wind blew in through the open window. It slammed the bedroom door. The old man could feel the evil of it in his bones. He heard it whisper his name. The wind passed through him and he immediately felt the change.

He suddenly stood up, kicking over the wheelchair. He took one step. And then another.

He felt his tongue and throat grow strong again.

"I'm coming for you, children," he said softly.

He stopped in front of the mirror and saw the crazed expression on his face. It made his heart pound with excitement.

He walked down the hall toward the grandchildren's room.

Evil thoughts played in his mind.

"I'm coming for you, children…"

Ocean Clowns

It was 4th of July weekend and the beaches were packed.

A mother began to scream for her child to get out of the water.

"Jenny!" she yelled hysterically. "JENNY!"

At first people around her thought the woman had stayed out in the sun too long. But then they looked out on the water. They saw it, too. Heading for shore. Heading for the children in the water. Pretty soon they were all screaming.

"Get out of the water!"

"Swim!"

"Run!"

"RUN!"

The people in the water began to splash and panic.

They now saw it, too. It was coming toward them. It was coming toward them!

A rainbow-colored wig with two big, red floppy shoes kicking up water behind it. It was… It had to be…

A clown!

And then to her horror, the lifeguard saw that it wasn't just one clown. The water was suddenly full of them. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Hundreds of clowns swimming to shore.

And then they started coming out of the water.

Sad clowns. Happy clowns. Scary clowns. Circus clowns. Hobo clowns. Rodeo clowns. Clowns on unicycles. Clowns on stilts. Clowns and more clowns coming out of small cars. Juggling clowns. Clowns squirting water from plastic flowers. Clowns tripping over themselves. Clowns tripping over other clowns. Clowns standing on the back of horses, ostriches, and sea monkeys.

The horror.

The horror!

First the National Guard was called in. Then the army. It was no use.

The clowns could not be stopped.

It was the end of the world. Not by some giant meteor. Not by a hole in the ozone. Not by disease. Not by flood or famine. Not by fire. Not by ice. It was the end of the world. By clowns.

CLOWNS!

Food Poisoning

First the soap ran out.
Then the toilet paper ran out.
Then the waiter brought your order.
Then you began to turn a little green.
Then—
[Insert a long farting noise here.]

Sol

Sarah and Sophie had been planning the sleepover for months. Finally, everything was ready. They had gotten permission. Everyone they had invited had said yes. It was going to be the best.

Sarah was super excited when she rang the doorbell.

Sophie's older brother, Sol, answered.

"What's he doing here?" she asked Sophie under her breath as they climbed the stairs.

"He has a cold and he's staying home tonight," Sophie said. "But he promised not to bother us."

Sarah sighed deeply.

Sol always gave her the creeps. He would hold his look until it became a full-blown stare and never said anything. Sarah couldn't tell what he was thinking behind those black eyes, but she knew it wasn't good. And he was always sweaty. Even in winter, a shiny coat of liquid creepiness covered his skinny, hollow face.

But once the party started, Sarah forgot all about Sol. She was having a great time.

And then she had to go to the bathroom. Sophie's house was old and the upstairs bedrooms shared one bathroom. Sarah had to walk down a long hallway to get to it. She hated the idea of sitting where Sol had been. Her stomach started doing backflips at the idea.

Maybe she should just hold it, she thought. But she really had to go. She carefully folded and placed toilet paper over the seat and sat down.

Afterward, as she walked down the hall, she heard sobbing coming from Sol's room. She stopped at the closed door and listened.

"Why?" he cried. "Why?"

"Because," another voice said. *"Because."*

The voice sounded dark and ominous and evil.

Suddenly Sarah leaned in too close to the door and lost her balance. She swung her arms and arched her back and managed to regain her equilibrium, but not without first gently nudging the door. To her horror, it slowly creaked opened.

Sol was crying on his knees in the middle of the floor as if praying. And he was alone.

Sarah and Sol looked at each other for one sweaty, terror-filled moment. Then she took off running down the hall.

Something inside her, something other than panic, told her to keep running. She passed by Sophie's bedroom and headed downstairs two steps at a time. In a few seconds she was out on the driveway.

As she ran down the dark sidewalk, the image of Sol's face flooded her mind. He had looked so sad and helpless there on his knees. She couldn't help but feel sorry for him, although she didn't know why.

"Wait," Sol called from behind. "Wait."

Sarah was torn. She was afraid but at the same time it wasn't Sol she feared.

She stopped under a streetlight and turned around.

Sol caught up to her. He put his clammy hand on her arm.

He was sweatier than Sarah had ever seen him. He didn't say anything but his eyes seemed to be pleading, almost begging.

"What is it?" Sarah said. "What's the matter?"

Sol didn't answer. He just stood there sweating. Great drops rolled down his face. And then the drops turned to streams. And then he started to melt right before her eyes. His legs and arms became mere stumps and his head shrunk down to the size of a small apple. And all the while, he kept sweating.

In the end there was nothing left, just a large puddle on the sidewalk.

The streetlight flickered and then went out.

And then, in the dark, Sarah heard the voice again, the one from Sol's room.

"You're next," it said. "You're next."

Sarah felt a chill and then a single bead of sweat rolled down her forehead.

"Why?" she cried. "Why?"

"Because," the voice whispered. "Be—"

AAAAH!

A Little Strange

The peanut butter and jelly sandwich tasted a little strange.

"Mom, I don't like this new jelly you got," Morris said. "It tastes like fishy cheese."

Just then he looked down and noticed that a corner of the sandwich was green and blue. It wasn't the jelly. It was the bread. The bread was moldy.

"Auugh," Morris said and spit out what was in his mouth. "That's gross, Mom!"

"Sorry about that, hon," she said, running over and bringing a soda. "Drink this."

Morris started watching TV and after a while forgot about the moldy sandwich.

But the next morning, Morris felt sick. He stayed in bed and didn't get up when his mom yelled that breakfast was ready.

When she went up to check on him, she didn't find him.

But there on his pillow was something that looked like a moldy orange, all black and white and green.

"I don't feel very well, Mom," the rotten fruit thing said. "I don't feel very well at all."

Morris's mom began to scream.

She couldn't stop screaming.

Morris's moldy head rolled onto the floor.

It began screaming, too.

What the Gypsy Saw

"What do you want to do?" Pedro said.

"I don't know," Barry said as he walked down the dusty street. "There's not much to do in this town."

The two young men were baseball players on the Tucson *Tuxedoes*. They were on the next to last day of a long road trip.

On their way back to the hotel, they saw a little, beat-up shack with a faded crystal ball painted on it.

"*Monica Knows All. Fortunes, $10*," a sign read. "*Money-back guaranteed*."

"Hey, how about giving the gypsy a crack?" Pedro said.

"I don't know," Barry said. "Sounds pretty stupid."

"It might be fun," Pedro said. "C'mon, I'll pay."

"Well in that case," Barry said. "Wouldn't want to discourage your newfound generosity."

They stepped inside.

"*Bienvenidos*," an old voice said. "Welcome."

When Barry's eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw an old woman sitting behind a little wooden table.

"Who's first?" she said.

"You go right ahead, big spender," Barry said and sat down on a chair in the corner.

The small, wrinkled woman could barely keep her eyes open as she turned over some cards that seemed to be as old as she was. She said Pedro would become rich and famous.

"I told you this was a good idea," Pedro said when she was finished. "It's your turn."

Barry sat down and watched as the fortuneteller looked at the cards. He was about to ask where her crystal ball was when she suddenly stood up.

"I'm sorry, I can't do this now," the old woman said in a shaky voice. "Here is your money."

She was clearly shaken, if not downright scared.

"Wait a minute," Barry said. "You saw something. What did you see?"

"Some things are better left unsaid, *señor*," she said, looking away.

"You sit back down and tell me," Barry said, getting angry. "What did you see?"

The old woman sat down and took a long breath before speaking.

"Like sand through the glass, your time ends white, black, and red," she said, her eyes filled with sadness. "Before the last out tomorrow, you will be dead."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Barry shouted.

"I am so sorry," she said. "That is all I can tell you. *Vaya con Dios.*"

"C'mon, bro," Pedro said when they were back outside. "She was just having a little fun with you. Do you seriously think someone who knows the future would be living in a little shack like that in a little town like this?"

"I see your point," Barry said. "But how did she know we were baseball players?"

"Lucky guess," Pedro said.

"Yeah, lucky guess," Barry repeated nervously. "Lucky guess."

"Three homeruns?" Pedro said back at their hotel room that night after the game. "You keep hitting like that, man, and you'll be in the majors in no time."

"No time," Barry mumbled from his bed.

He had almost forgotten about what the old woman had said earlier, but now Pedro's words brought it all back.

"What's that, bro?" Pedro said and yawned.

"Like sand through the glass, your time ends white, black, and red," Barry said. "How did the rest of it go?"

"Let it go, man," Pedro said. "It didn't mean anything."

"How did it go?" Barry yelled.

"Before the last out tomorrow, you will be dead," Pedro said slowly. "But don't let it eat you up. You'll see tomorrow she didn't know what she was talking about. Get some sleep, bro."

Staring up at the black ceiling, Barry didn't answer. The old woman's words kept bouncing around in his head. What did they mean?

Like sand through the glass, your time ends white, black, and red.

Before the last out tomorrow, you will be dead.

What did it mean?

The next afternoon Barry was having another great game with four hits, including a homer. There were two outs in the bottom of the ninth and the *Tuxedoes* were leading, 5-4. The bases were loaded and the other team had their best hitter at the plate.

"Stupid old woman," Barry said, standing out in left field. "I have a mind to go over there and get Pedro's money back."

He watched as the pitcher delivered a strike. Then, as the hitter swung and missed at the next pitch, Barry felt a sharp pain in his glove hand.

A moment later he looked down and saw something big and black crawling up his arm. He heard the ball explode off the bat. The home crowd cheered wildly.

Barry swiped at the large spider with the back of his right hand, sending it spinning through the air. It seemed to twirl in slow motion. Barry let out a gasp when he saw the red hourglass on the black widow's hideously large belly.

Time sped up again and he remembered the ball, too late. When he looked up a split second later, all he saw was a giant white sphere coming right at his face, blocking out the world. There was a second explosion. And then everything turned black.

The crowd went deathly silent.

Zombie Forest

The forest closed in.
The trees started to spin.
Zombies came out.
The campers began to shout.
They made a terrible din.
An arm, a rib, a bloody shin.
A head, a toe, a hip-hip hooray.
Bleed and die to live another day.

'Round the Campfire

The nine scouts sat around the campfire with Mr. Monroe, their troop leader.

"You're the turd," little Morris Malone said.

"*You're* the turd your mama made," Milton Matthews said.

"All right, you clowns," Mr. Monroe said. "Looks like it's gonna be a cold one. I'm going to get some more firewood. Why don't you fellas take turns telling scary stories?"

He got up and disappeared into the dark forest.

"I'll go first," Manny said. "This story is called *The Hook*."

"Heard it, turd it," Morris said.

"It's not the one you're thinking of," Manny said.

"Go head on then," Matt said.

"There was this songwriter," Manny began. "His songs were okay, but they weren't catchy. They didn't have a hook. Across town there was a newspaper reporter. His stories were okay, but his first paragraphs didn't grab the readers. They didn't have a hook. In another part of the city there was a fisherman—"

Milton yawned loudly. Pretty soon they were all yawning.

Manny kept on with his story.

"Hey, guys," Marco said after a while. "Where'd Morris go?"

"I dunno," Matt said. "Maybe he had to pee."

"Morris go pee-pee," Mason said and began laughing and drooling white marshmallow foam down his chin and onto his neckerchief. "Morris go pee-pee."

Manny kept on with his story.

A while later Milton noticed that Marshall had left the circle.

"Hey, guys," he said. "Where'd Marshall go?"

"I dunno," Matt said. "Maybe he had to make potty."

"Marshall go potty," Mason said and began laughing again and drooling the white marshmallow foam. "Marshall go potty."

Undeterred, Manny kept on with his story.

Mr. Monroe still had not returned.

And then one by one, the rest of the boys—Marco, Matt, Morley, Milton, Morgan, and Mason—went off into the woods and didn't come back. There was just Manny left.

Manny kept on with his story.

Then an evil creature walked up and sat by the fire. Manny didn't notice that it was chewing on Morley's arm. The creature began listening to Manny's story.

After a while it yawned, got up, and walked back into the woods.

Manny kept on with his st—AAAAH!

After We Die

“What happens after we die?” Julian asked.
“Don’t you know?” the voice said.
“No,” Julian said. “How would I know?”
“Because,” the voice answered, “you’re the one who’s dead.”

Bloody Larry

A few years back, on a night much like this one, I tried to make a ghost appear.

A group of us found an abandoned house and went in through a broken window. Then we sat in a circle and made up a story about a guy named Bloody Larry. Someone said that 13 years ago on this very night, Bloody Larry had died. Someone else said he had been killed upstairs by his sister. We took turns adding details like that to the story. Who he was, how his sister had killed him and why, what you had to do to make him appear, and what happened to you if he actually did appear. (I contributed that last part.)

I won't bore you with all the particulars. It was all pretty goofy really. I don't think any of us took any of it too seriously. We were just having fun.

Anyway, we started taking turns getting locked into one of the upstairs bedrooms. It was just us and a candle. According to the "story," we had to say his name 13 times.

A few of the others said they saw Bloody Larry, or saw something, when they opened their eyes. I'm not sure I believed them. They were just trying to add to the mood, was all that was.

Then it was my turn.

I climbed the creaky, old stairs and went into the room *where he had been killed*. I closed my eyes and started thinking about what story I would make up to tell the rest of them. Then I began chanting.

"Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry…" I said. "Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry, Bloody Larry."

I counted along on my fingers to make sure I was holding up my end. Thirteen times.

Nothing happened, of course. I didn't see anything. When I opened my eyes the candle seemed stronger, making everything brighter. But that was it.

There's not much more to tell.

Like I said, Bloody Larry never did appear that night.

In any case, that's what I tell people.

[Now turn and stare at someone like you are completely out of your mind. Hold the stare and say:]

I suggest you tell them the same thing.

***

It can be useful to smear some ketchup on your face prior to telling this story. Keep your face in the dark until the end. Then turn the flashlight on yourself and lunge toward some poor soul. Or if you are the techie type, maybe you can get a red filter attachment for your flashlight. Just a thought.

Campfire Thing

The flames danced in the campfire. But there was something else there among the burning colors. Something that didn't dance. Something that had no color—except for the color of death. Something that waited. Something that waited until everyone was asleep.

The Soccer Bag

The soccer bag sat in the corner of the darkened bedroom. At the far end, Olivia snored in her bed.

Suddenly the bag began to zip itself open.

The horrid smell of the sweaty mildewed socks came shooting out. The odor was so strong, it woke Olivia.

"Siiiick," she sighed, turning away.

A moment later Olivia's cleats stepped out of the bag.

"What was that?" she said.

Then the shin guards came out, followed by the socks. Then the shorts and the jersey. Finally the ball rolled out of the bag.

Nothing else happened until…

The shin guards began to rise off the floor, floating over the shoes. Then the socks. Then the shorts and above the shorts, the jersey. Then the ball suddenly flew through the air, bouncing hard against the wall over Olivia's head before taking its place above the shirt.

"What was that?" Olivia shouted.

She sat up and saw that the contents of the soccer bag had formed themselves into some sort of coat hanger figure, without the hanger.

The silhouette just floated there for a moment and then took a step toward the bed. And then another.

Olivia exploded off the bed and ran for the door.

The figure reached out a *leg*, and Olivia went down hard.

"Yellow card me if you must," it said and laughed, the muffled sound coming from inside the ball.

The thing then started kicking Olivia in the stomach and face.

"Why?" she gasped, trying to cover up, trying to understand. "Why?"

She tried to call for help but no words came out.

Kick, kick, kick. In the face. In the gut. Thud, thud, thud. In the face. In the gut. Kick, kick, kick.

Olivia would never know why.

[Curl up on the ground. Wait. Wait. Wait. And then…]

AAAAH!

Leave It to Beaver

The old man was near death.

"Please," he whispered. "Give me another chance. I'll do anything. *Anything*."

Suddenly the temperature rose until the old man felt like he was inside an oven. Shades of red and orange covered the walls. The smell of sulfur filled the room.

Someone was standing in the shadows.

"It's your lucky day, my friend," a voice said. "Just sign here."

The old man could barely hold the strange pen—it looked more like a goat horn and burned his fingers—but he managed to scrawl his name on the old, parchment-looking paper.

"Good," the voice said. "Good. Now, there are some things you need to know. First, you will come back as a boy, but your face and hair will make you look like an attractive young woman. This will add to your appeal. You will become hugely popular, rich, loved, and hated. You will also have a new name. It will sound like the name of a large aquatic rodent with a flat tail. Any questions? Oh, here's what you will look like."

The old man was suddenly holding a mirror. His eyes widened in comprehension and horror.

"I've changed my mind," he said, dropping the mirror on the floor. "Anything but that. I didn't understand. Take my soul. Anything but that. Take me down there with you. Please, anything but that! I don't want to live if it means being B—"

"I'm afraid it's too late, old man," the voice said. "We had a deal. If I were you, I'd start combing my hair and practicing my, um, *singing*."

Down There

He was down there under the cold, rushing water.

His leg was trapped between two boulders. He struggled to free himself but only managed to lodge it tighter and tighter and tighter. At some point he ran out of air. He felt himself floating above the water for a short time, but then went back down.

Down, down, down.

He thought about how he should have learned how to swim or how he should have learned where not to swim or how he should have worn his life jacket or a million other thoughts that came to him too late.

He had a long time to think now.

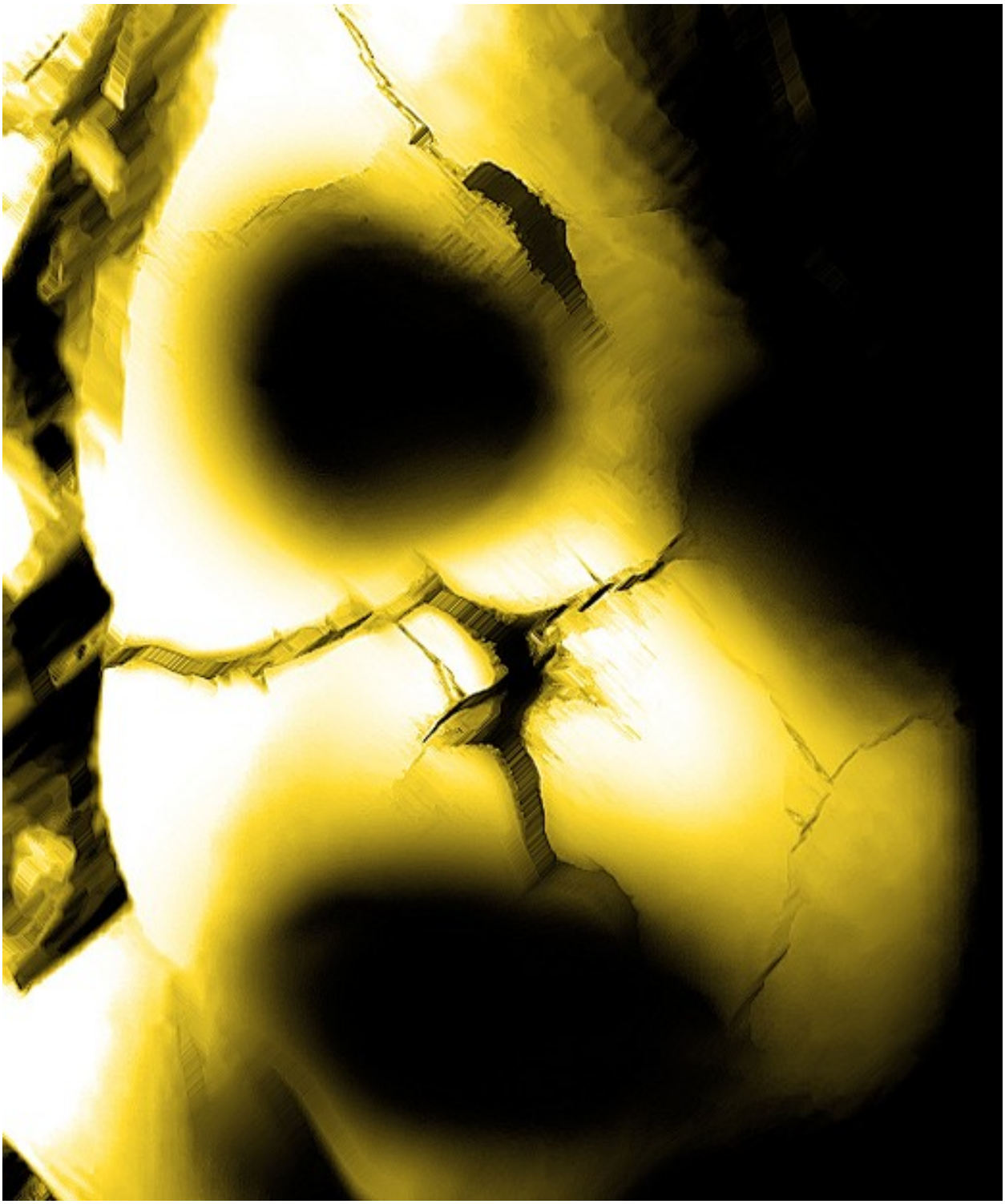
He was going to be there for a long time. He was going to be there until his skin was gone, along with his bones and every other part of him.

Until all that remained was his ghost.

Down there under the cold, rushing water.

Staring at the Sun

“Don’t stare at the sun,” the woman said.
“Why not, Mommie?” the little boy said.
“Because your eyes will catch fire,” she answered.
“You mean like this, Mommie?” he said.
She turned to look at her young son.
His eyes ran like lava down his cheeks.
“Yes, like that,” she said. “Just like that.”



El Sediento

"C'mon, stupid dog," Ed said under his breath. "C'mon."

"Cucho!" the little girl cried. *"Ven aqui. Cucho!"*

The Golden Retriever puppy was playing with a lizard in the middle of the street. A 16-wheeler was barreling down toward it. It didn't look like the truck was going to stop.

"Cucho!" the girl screamed.

In a flash Ed sprinted out onto the road and scooped up the little dog. Then he disappeared behind the truck and a cloud of dust.

A moment later he walked back across the street and handed the dog to the little girl.

"Gracias, señor," she said, the puppy licking the tears off her cheeks. *"Perro malo."*

"I hope you do not come to regret your kind *jester*," the old gas station attendant said later as Ed finished stocking the vending machine with sodas from his van.

"What do you mean?" Ed said.

"*El Sediento*, the Thirsty One, he no like dogs," the old man said. "And he become most *rabioso*, very angry, when people stop the killing."

"What killing?" Ed asked.

The old man explained that *El Sediento* was the ghost of a man who had lived in the village more than a hundred years earlier. One day the man was bitten by a dog with rabies. The man died a few weeks later.

"*Muy loco* in the end, he cry the saliva from his mouth and scream about the water," the old man said. "He very thirsty but also he very *afred* of *agua*, the water. After *El Sediento*, he die, all the dogs of the town begin to die as well. This village no have no dogs for 100 years now."

"That's one crazy story," Ed said.

"Is no a story, *mi amigo*," the man said. "As a child I saw *El Sediento* with my very two eyes. He kill my dog."

On the drive back toward the Texas border, Ed thought about his own dog, Cornelius, waiting for him back home. Then he heard something coming from the back of the van.

"Por favor, agua," a voice called. *"Agua, por favor. El agua noooo!"*

Ed was afraid to look in the rearview mirror, but he looked anyway.

There, behind some soda cases, was a small man with a poncho and a tattered sombrero. Great big tears spilled from his large eyes and foam covered his mouth and chin. His hand was wrapped in a bloody bandage. At first the man's expression was one of terrible suffering and terror, but then he looked right at Ed. Baring his teeth, he began to growl. His black eyes shone with a mad, evil hatred that filled the inside of the van.

The man did not speak again. He just kept growling and staring at Ed. He floated closer and closer to the driver's seat.

A loud horn got Ed's attention just in time. He had drifted over into the oncoming lane. He swerved, narrowly avoiding a crash.

When he looked back in the mirror again, the man was gone.

"That's nonsense right there," Ed said in a shaky voice as he rolled down the window. "Power of suggestion is all that is."

He took several deep breaths and began to calm down.

"That old man was pulling my leg. *El Sediento*, really? C'mon, Ed."

By the time he fell asleep that night, Ed had pretty much forgotten the whole thing. But at some point he had a terrible nightmare.

"Por favor, agua," a voice whispered in agony. *"Agua, por favor. El agua noooo!"*

The man in the poncho was sitting at the foot of the bed, his back toward Ed. He slowly turned around. Drooling, he again stared at Ed with those eyes, those black, horrible, hate-filled eyes. He pointed at Ed with his bloody hand. And then he began to float over the bed, coming closer and closer and clo—

"Aaaah!"

Ed screamed in the dark till he realized it was just a dream. He turned on the light. There was nothing there. He heard the rain pounding on the roof. He grabbed the glass of water from his nightstand and took a long drink.

In the morning Cornelius woke Ed. He was licking the foot of the bed in the spot where *El Sediento* had been in the nightmare.

"What's gotten into you, fool dog?" Ed said.

He reached down to pet the animal's head and then felt the bed. It was wet with a thick, sick-smelling foamy lather.

"Eewh, what the hell?" Ed said.

He got up, had some coffee, and changed into his running clothes.

"Let's go, Corn Dog," he called as he headed out the door.

Cornelius led the way as they ran down the desert trail.

Ed was tired but glad it was the morning. The sun was shining. He was looking forward to a new day and to putting the silliness of *El Sediento* behind him.

But as they rounded a bend through a steep section of large rocks, Cornelius stopped dead and began to whimper.

Ed stopped too and looked down at the terrified dog.

"There's nothing th—"

He suddenly felt the hairs on the back of his neck and arms stand up.

When he looked up, he saw it floating there above the trail.

El Sediento.

He pointed at Ed with his bloody hand. The eyes were blacker than ever and spilled over with malevolent venom. Ed took a step back. But it was too late. A moment later a big boulder above him loosened. There was no time to get out of the way. Ed and the dog were crushed to death.

"Por favor, agua. Agua, por favor. El agu—AAAAH!"

***

Rabies kills more than 50,000 people a year, mostly in Asia and Africa. One of its symptoms is hydrophobia, in which a thirsty patient develops a fear of water because he cannot swallow as his throat muscles slowly become paralyzed.

Voodoo Doll

Drums beating. Louder and louder. Chanting. Dark curses in the night. Possessed dancing. Arms, legs, sweating, spinning. Twirling round and round. Faster and faster. Drums beating, beating, beating…

Pins reaching out for justice. Finding my skin. Piercing my skin. Stabbing me. Hurting me. Make it stop. Make it stop. Pins piercing, piercing, piercing…

Far away, far away, far away. My shadow twin screams out in pain. Piercing, stabbing, hurting. Make it stop. Make it stop. My twin closes his eyes, slumps over, and dies. And I die. I die to the sound of drums beating. I die, die, die…

Sleepover

Geraldine had an awesome time at the slumber party. There was giggling and cake and soda and plenty of talk about dreamy boys. But when she woke up, all the other girls were gone. And it was still dark. What was stranger still was that this wasn't even her house.

"Where would they have gone?" she said out loud.

Geraldine tried to remember. But she couldn't. She couldn't remember whose house it was or the names of the other girls.

"Help," she suddenly called out, gripped with panic. "Help!"

A woman dressed in white walked in the room.

"It's all right, Mrs. Nelson," the nurse said. "Did you have that dream again?"

"What dream?" Geraldine asked, looking around and seeing that she was in a hospital bed.

"The one about the slumber party," the nurse said, reaching for a diaper. "The one where you're a young girl."

The Storm

"I guess we should consider ourselves lucky," Bob said. "This thing could have hit while we were still out on the trail."

A storm was raging outside. The wet tent walls flapped in the howling wind.

"Yeah," Bo said. "We can take some comfort in being in here—until the tent rips to shreds."

"I don't think that'll happen," Ed said. "They build these things pretty good."

"We'll see," Bo said, shouting above the wind.

John was on his back with his feet up against the wall that was taking the biggest beating.

Bob said something that no one else could hear. He knew what he was trying to say but only because it was in his mind, not because he could hear himself.

"Wait, did you hear that?" Ed shouted.

"No, what?" the other three said.

"Something out there was calling my name," Ed said.

Outside and all around, only the wind could be heard.

"There it is again," Ed said.

"I don't think so," Bob said.

Suddenly Ed got up, unzipped the tent, and walked out into the storm.

"Ed!" they called. "Where are you going?"

"Maybe he had to relieve himself," Bo said. "Hope he knows better than to pee into the wind."

"Well, if he doesn't," John shouted. "He will after tonight."

The storm showed no signs of letting up.

"I think I hear it now," Bob said after a while. "It's calling me."

"C'mon, Bob," John said. "It's just the wind. Or crazy Ed messing with your head."

"No, man, it's real," Bob said.

He then got out of his sleeping bag and walked out into the storm.

"Those guys are nuts," Bo said. "I wouldn't go out there. Not in a million years."

"I hear ya," John said.

Somehow the wind began to blow even harder. Flashes of lightning lit up the night and thunder crashed overhead.

"Ed must be pretty wet by now," Bo said. "What are they doing out there?"

John didn't answer.

"John?" Bo said.

He turned and saw that John wasn't there. Bo was now alone inside the tent.

"The hell with those guys," he said.

And then he heard it. Something beyond the wind and the rain and the thunder and the lightning was calling his name.

"Booooo," it wailed. "Booooo."

"No!" Bo shouted. "I can't hear you."

"Boooooooooo," it moaned.

Bo didn't want to, but he crawled to the door and, although he *really* didn't want to, he went outside.

The sideways rain pelted his face and he had to squint to see anything.

Everything was noise and noise and noise and dark noise.

“Booooo,” the voice said again. “Booooo, I’m right here.”
Just then a bolt of lightning illuminated everything for a moment.
Bo couldn’t believe his eyes. What he saw filled him with—AAAAH!

Bat Cave

"Looks like Ol' Gertie died from a slow and steady loss of blood," Doc Hamline said. "See all these bite marks?"

The cow was covered with little puncture marks.

"It's them blasted bats, ain't it?" Ol' Man Dixon said.

"Afraid so," the vet said. "But your other animals seem healthy. I think they just went after Gertie here 'cause her time was nearing. She was old and weak. I don't suspect this will be an ongoing problem for you."

"You can bet the farm on that," Ol' Man Dixon said. "Them bats have gone kilt their last cow."

That afternoon the old farmer loaded up the back of his ATV with gas cans and gasoline-filled bottles. Then he headed off for the hills south of his property.

Twenty minutes later he reached a large cave.

He unloaded his supplies and took them inside. Then he poured a generous amount of gasoline just inside the opening and took a lighter to it. The inside of the cave grew as bright as day. Ol' Man Dixon could see the bats hanging from the ceiling and walls. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them.

He started lighting the rag-topped bottles and smashing them against the walls.

"Take that!" Ol' Man Dixon shouted. "And that!"

The bats, some of them on fire, began screeching and screaming around the cave. When they found the exit blocked, they panicked and started crashing into the fiery walls.

The smell of burning bats and Ol' Man Dixon's laughter filled the cave.

After a while the screaming died down.

Ol' Man Dixon threw the last bottle at the last bat, watching it dance and twitch. Then he headed toward the opening. It was still blocked by fire.

Acting like a man a quarter of his age, the old farmer suddenly somersaulted through the flames and rolled out into the sunlight.

Laughing, he swatted at his smoldering left sleeve.

That night Ol' Man Dixon was in a particularly fine mood. He brought out his best whiskey, which he only drank on the most special occasions. He even grabbed and danced with Ol' Woman Dixon around the kitchen table.

"What's gotten into you?" the old woman said, breathing hard.

"I dunno," Ol' Man Dixon said and smiled. "I reckon watching 'em varmints burn lifted my spirits a bit."

Later that night, Ol' Man Dixon woke his wife with his screams.

"Get away!" he shouted. "Get 'em off me! Get 'em off me!"

The old woman turned on the light. The old man was flailing away like he was being attacked. But there was nothing there.

"Get 'em off me! Get 'em off me!" he kept yelling.

Ol' Woman Dixon called the doctor.

By the time he got there, the screaming had stopped.

They found Ol' Man Dixon peaceful as could be. Peaceful, pale, and dead. He had been completely drained of blood.

“Strangest thing,” the doctor would later say. “I can’t begin to explain where all that blood went. There were no signs of internal bleeding. And there wasn’t a single mark on him. And another thing: a strong sickly ammonia odor surrounded the old man. I couldn’t find any explanation for that either. I can still smell it though. It almost reminded me of the time bats had invaded my attic.”

The Scout

"No!" Kaley yelled. "Nooooo!"

The bed beneath her was shaking uncontrollably.

"She's down here with us," a distorted voice wailed from below.

"Nooooo!" Kaley shouted.

Finally, Lucy had to stop, she was laughing so hard. She crawled out from under the bed.

Kaley was huddled against a corner, sobbing.

A moment later their mother burst into the room.

"What's all this screaming about in here?" she said. "It's bedtime."

"She was scaring me," Kaley cried. "She was making the bed move."

"All right, young lady," the mother said. "No more scary movies for you until you learn how to be nice to your little sister. And I'm not taking you to your softball game tomorrow."

Lucy made a face.

She loved watching horror movies, but this had almost been worth it. Those screams were epic. Besides, her mom would forget all about it in a few days. And softball… Well, that wasn't any big deal.

Lucy woke up thirsty later that night. She looked over at the Red Sox clock radio on her nightstand. The numbers were flashing 12:12.

Her feet felt like they were on fire. She kicked off the covers and hit something at the foot of the bed.

"Take it easy," a voice suddenly said.

Lucy sat up and noticed that there was someone sitting on the bed down by her feet. Even in the dark, she sensed that it wasn't anyone she knew. Or anyone she wanted to know. Lucy was about to scream when the voice spoke again.

"No need for that," it said. "I would only have to make you sorry. And believe me when I say that you would be very sorry."

"Who are you?" Lucy whispered. "What do you want?"

"My name is not important right now," the strange voice said. "I am on a scouting trip."

"Scouting trip?" Lucy said. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I guess you could say I'm recruiting *players* for our, um, *team*," the voice said.

"Your team?" Lucy asked. "What team?"

"Not my team," the voice said. "The Man downstairs. He sees real promise in you. He was quite taken by that little number under the bed."

"You saw that? But I was just playing around," Lucy said. "I was only having fun."

"Oh, but you see, that's our specialty," the voice said. "That's what we're all about. I can promise you that you'll have infinitely more fun with us than if you join that other team. They're such bores."

"Can I think about it?" Lucy said and yawned.

"Sure," the voice said. "No hurry. In the meantime I'll pay your sister a little visit."

"Kaley?" Lucy said. "I think you're wasting your time there."

"You're probably right," the voice said. "But those screams *were* epic. We were hoping to tempt her into joining our yell squad. Atmosphere is so important. Don't you think?"

Before Lucy had a chance to answer, the entire room was engulfed in flames. A moment later the flames were gone.

Lucy fell back asleep.

Poop Log

"Where I come from we have something called the Log of Poop," Cesc said. "Every night we feed it and cover it with a blanket. Then one day, when it is time, we throw it in the fire or sometimes simply hit it, and sing to it, and it poops out little candies and presents. We share the treats. Everyone is happy."

All was quiet for a moment, and then the class erupted in laughter.

"Now that's a very interesting tradition, Cesc," Mrs. Morris said, trying to regain control. "Thank you for sharing."

"But I'm not finished," Cesc said. "I haven't told you about the pooping statues. They are very popular."

"Maybe some other time," the teacher said quickly. "It's math time."

"That story makes me want to go to the bathroom," Marvin said.

"Can I go lie down, Mrs. Morris?" Donny said. "I'm pooped."

The class kept laughing.

"That's enough, class," Mrs. Morris said.

"Mrs. Morris, can I sit on your *stool*?" Alfred asked.

"That's it," the teacher said. "Alfred, you just lost your recess."

Alfred watched the other kids playing outside through the window. He tapped the desk angrily with his pencil.

"I'm gonna get that crappy Cesc," he said under his breath. "I'll fix him good."

After school Alfred took the long way home. He stopped in front of Cesc's house and stared. There it was out on the porch—a log with a big red happy face painted on it, covered with a blanket.

"Man, that's so stupid," he said.

He walked up quietly, making sure no one was around. Then he unzipped his backpack and placed the log inside.

When he reached the highest part of the bridge that crossed the Cornpone River, he threw the log over the side. He watched it splash and then sink under the surface. A few moments later it popped back up and floated downstream.

"Mr. Poop go bye-bye," Alfred said and laughed.

The next day Cesc looked sad.

"Hey, what's the matter, Cesc?" Alfred said after school. "You look like somebody peed all over poop log."

"As the matter of some fact…"

"Sorry, I don't have time to stand around and shoot the, uh, breeze," Alfred said. "I'm late for football practice."

"My favorite football player is Carles Puyol," Cesc called out.
"Isn't he a baseball player?" Alfred said. "Never mind, whatever."

It was dark by the time Alfred got home. His mom left him a note reminding him to take a shower and that dinner was in the fridge.

He went upstairs and took off his cleats and pads. A ghastly smell swirled around him. He sniffed his shoes and then under his arm.

"That is ripe right there, son," Alfred said. "I guess I do need a shower."

He stepped into the bathroom and turned on the light.

Something was written in brown crayon on the mirror.

"Alfred go bye-bye," it read.

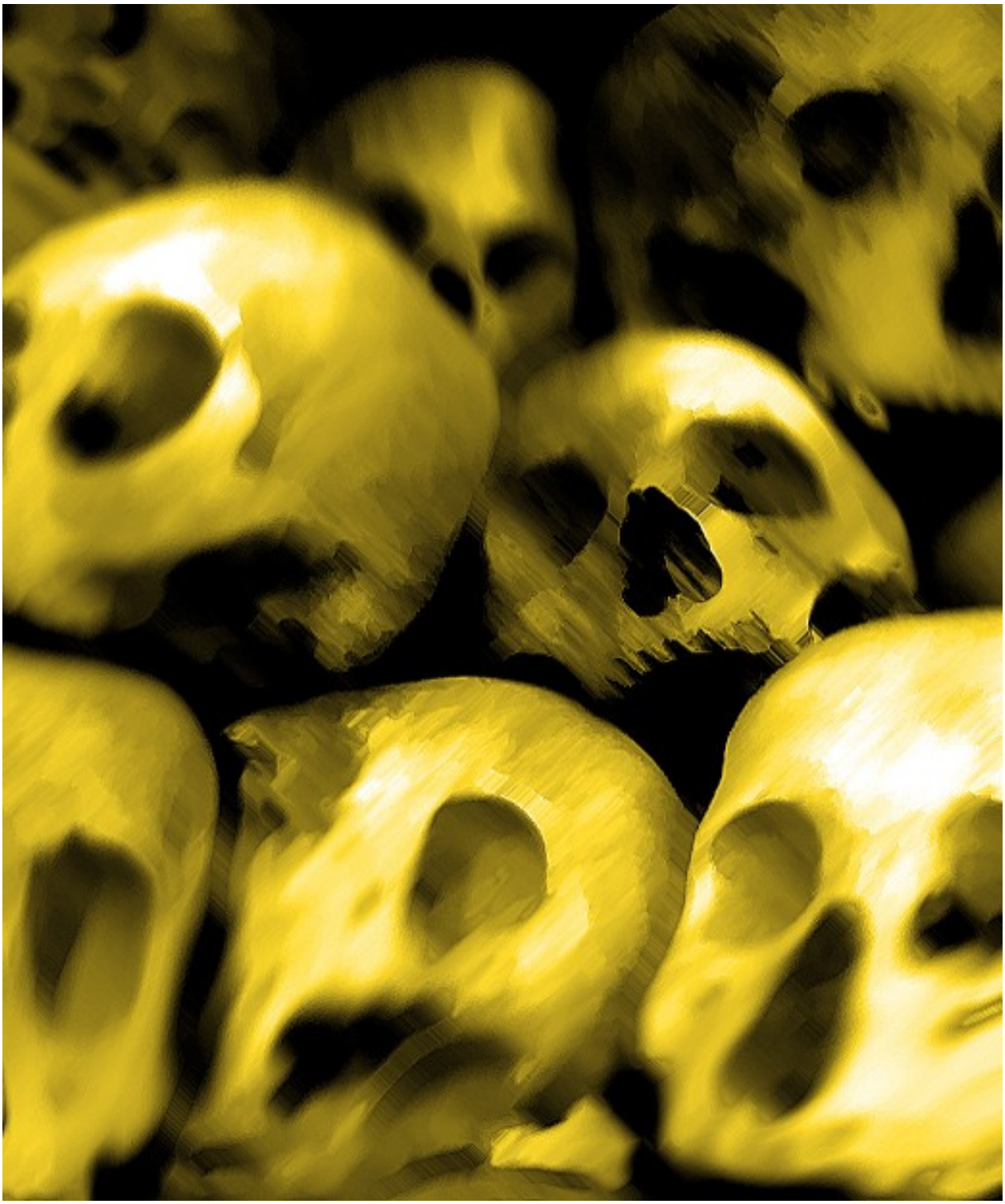
Alfred reached out and touched the letters with his fingers. It wasn't crayon.

"Gross," he said. "What's going on here?"

He started to wash his hands but stopped when he heard the door slam. The bathroom was immediately filled with a horrible smell that made Alfred gag as he tried to gasp for air. He reached for the doorknob but stopped cold.

Standing there blocking the exit was the log from Cesc's house.

It wasn't smiling anymore.



The Cold Room

The room was always cold. No matter what the temperature was outside. No matter what the thermostat said. Even in the middle of summer. Even during record-breaking heat waves. The room was always cold.

Cold, cold, cold.

There were never enough blankets. There were never enough sweaters. There were never enough parkas. The heating vents pumped in no heat. The portable heaters acted like air conditioners. There were never enough blankets. There were never enough sweaters. There were never enough parkas. The room was always cold.

It was a good place to store wine. It was a good place to preserve the dead. It was a good place to see if you were as cool as McCready. It was a good place to wait on *The Thing's* next move.

The room was always cold.

Brrr. Brrr. Brrr.

The Dawn Comes Too Late

Sometimes the dawn comes too late.

Sometimes at night the thoughts grow feet and walk around.

Some mutate into worries, transforming dreams into nightmares. Others become fears and sprout dragon wings. In the dark they fly and ride roughshod over the mind.

Sometimes screams fill the night. Screams no one else hears.

Sometimes the dawn comes too late.

It Lives in the Mind

I blow in through an open window. A nostril, an ear, an uncovered yawn hole.

I do my best work in the dark. I start by sprinkling a few suggestions here and there. Small things at first. I am patient. I have time. All the time. I water and wait for my seeds to take root and grow.

"Pinch the kid sitting in front of you," I whisper. "Pinch him."

A few moments later a loud cry echoes through the classroom, telling me I have been successful.

But the teacher is on to us.

"Good," I say. "Bring it on."

Time to take it to the next level.

"Tell her her mother was a jackal," I say. "A smelly jackal."

The woman is shocked at first and cannot speak. Then she stammers something about sending us to the office.

There we sit, waiting on the principal.

I know a certain type is drawn to that job. A small mind consumed with power. Small and dark.

Why not? I ask myself.

And I can't think of one reason.

I leave the kid and enter my new host.

"Doesn't sound like you did anything wrong, Johnny," we say. "After all, her mother *was* a jackal."

We laugh and I can see the kid is baffled.

"Take the rest of the day off," we say. "You deserve it."

The kid shuffles out the door in a cloud of confusion.

"Now, pull the fire alarm," I say. "No, better yet, set fire to your own car."

The principal walks out to the parking lot.

Even before I smell the gasoline and hear the explosion, I can already tell this is going to be a good day.

Don't Kill the Messenger

"Here comes another one," Edward said under his breath. "Crazy old coots."

The old man shuffled slowly toward the row of mailboxes.

Edward had been a mail carrier for 18 years now, but he had never gotten used to the obsession old people had with mail. He knew for a fact that most of what he delivered was useless junk and that retirement checks came around the first of the month. But these people carried on like every day was Christmas or something. He wondered how they survived Sundays without mail.

Hovering, trying or not trying to contain their excitement, making small talk, smelling all nasty like.

"Good morning, Edmund," the old man said.

It's Edward, you ol' fart, Edward thought but said: "Good morning, sir."

"Mind if I check my box?" the old man said, not waiting for Edward to answer.

The key shook uncontrollably in his hand.

"Let me get that for you," Edward said. *Or else we'll be here all freakin' day.*

There was one lime green envelope in the old man's box.

"Here you go, sir," Edward said, handing over the key and the letter.

"My orders have arrived," the old man said with a strange twinkle in his eye.

He tore open the envelope.

What's this loon talking about? Edward thought as he finished putting the last of the mail into the last box.

Suddenly a terrible pain ripped through the side of his neck.

Edward reached up and felt the warm blood spilling from him. He pulled something from the wound. Dentures!

Edward collapsed down onto the sidewalk. He could see more old people heading toward him. They seemed to be moving faster than usual. Running even. Edward thought some of them were carrying knives and forks. But his mind was rapidly losing its ability to make such assessments.

The last thing he saw was the toothless old man smiling with pride.

Reunion of the Damned

"Why do we have to come here every year?" Liam asked.

"He was our father," Wyatt said.

"He was a loser," Liam said.

"I won't argue that," Wyatt said, driving up the narrow dirt path. "But he was still our father."

The car came to a stop under a large oak tree.

"You can stay if you want," Wyatt said, opening his door. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

Liam didn't say anything. He looked out the window and watched his older brother walk up to their father's tombstone. He tried to think of one good memory, but he couldn't.

The dead leaves over the grave suddenly began to dance as a gust of wind lifted them off the ground and then toward the car. They stopped just outside the passenger window for a second. To Liam it looked like the leaves had formed themselves into the shape of a man.

Then they all fell back to the ground.

"That was weird," Liam said out loud as the goose bumps shot up his arms.

A moment later a horrible smell filled the car. Without even looking, Liam knew there was now something in the back seat, something that hadn't been there just a minute before.

"You shouldn't speak ill of the dead," someone whispered in Liam's ear. "I see I still need to teach you some manners."

Liam hadn't heard that voice in years, but he recognized it instantly. Before he could get out of the car, something grabbed him from behind. He looked over and saw a gray, rotting hand on his shoulder. The skin and flesh were eaten all the way to the bone in places.

Liam screamed.

"Quiet," his father said, squeezing his fingers around Liam's neck. "You'll wake the dead. First lesson: Don't stay in the car when visiting your father's grave. Let's go."

Against his will, Liam felt himself being lifted off the seat, out of the car, and up the hill.

Back at the grave, Wyatt saw Liam coming toward him.

"Changed your mind, huh?" he said.

But Liam didn't answer.

As he came closer Wyatt could see an expression of complete horror on his brother's face. His eyes were bulging and he looked like he was trying to say something.

"What's wrong?" Wyatt asked.

Again, Liam didn't say anything. He just moved past him. It almost looked like he wasn't touching the ground.

Wyatt turned around.

"No," Liam finally said, looking at something next to him. "Nooooo!"

And then, to Wyatt's utter shock, Liam started sinking down into the ground just in front of the tombstone. Right before he disappeared completely, he screamed once again.

"No," he said. "Help. Help me!"

And then he was gone.

Liam was never seen again.

[Pause…]

AAAAH!

Allergy Medicine

He woke up with a dead man's tongue.

It felt bone dry, like someone had ripped it from his mouth and left it to shrivel in the desert sand for several months. And then, right before the monsoons began, they had made a special trip for it and looked around for a while, almost giving up, not recognizing it at first, confusing it with an old hairy coyote turd, and sewed it back in place.

It always tasted funny after that. But that was to be expected.

At least he had stopped sneezing.

The Flashlight

The girls took turns reading scary stories.
"My turn," Gail said, taking the flashlight and the old book.
"That's weird," she said. "This one's called *The Flashlight*."
Just then the flashlight went out. Gail played with it but couldn't get it to go back on.
"Hey," Wanda said. "I wanna know what happens."
"You want to know what happens?" a strange voice said in the dark. "*This* is what happens."
AAAAH!

***

It's best, of course, to tell this story with a flashlight. No duh.

Three Animals

The cat purred.
The dog barked.
The monkey scratched your eyeballs out.

What the River Brought

Morning Man: That was Credence Clearwater Revival on WZHIT with *Who'll Stop the Rain.* The answer, boys: no one. No one will stop the rain. But we sure appreciate the thought and we certainly could use a clear water revival around these parts. Today's WZHIT question of the day: does anyone remember when it started raining? Personally, I lost track when we passed 40 days and 40 nights.

And the National Weather Service is calling for, drumroll please, wait for it, wait for it… 6-8 more inches of the wet stuff by tomorrow night.

This is your morning man, Morning Man, with the entire Morning Man crew wishing you the top of the day on WZHIT, broadcasting not so high above the ever-rising Cookoochu River and what used to be the town of Claymoresville. Hey, News Man, remember when there used to be a town of Claymoresville?

News Man: Things like streets, schools, churches, parks, gas stations, supermarkets, banks, hospitals, movie theaters, and the like? Seems like that all's been a piece of time ago right there.

Morning Man: All right, then, enough small talk. What's new this morning from the WZHIT news desk?

News Man: Our top story: Untreated sewage continues to pour into the Cookoochu River from the Harris Treatment Plant 40 miles upriver from us as the crow flies this morning. Estimates put the spill at more than a million gallons of raw human waste—with no end in sight.

Morning Man: Man, oh, man, News Man. I never thought of constipation as a good thing. Until further notice, folks, remember to eat plenty of cheese and stay away from that there fiber. We all need to do our part.

News Man: Amen to that, Morning Man. This just in: more coffins and corpses continue to wash up from the Southern Man at Rest Cemetery, which like pretty much everything else around these parts is now completely underwater.

Morning Man: I can attest to that, News Man. Paddling in to work this morning, I came across several caskets. It's gotten to the point where I don't think twice on it. You know, some of them modern coffins are surprisingly seaworthy, but those older, pine models are no match for the force of the wa—

News Man: Sorry to interrupt, Morning Man. We have breaking news. There are unconfirmed reports of… No, this has to be someone's idea of a sick joke. I should wait for WZHIT's own Reporter Man to verify this.

Morning Man: What is it, News Man? Don't keep the good folks in the dark now.

News Man: All right, Morning Man. But please remember that these reports are unconfirmed. Reporter Man is on his way to the scene as we speak to get to the bottom of this. But we have unconfirmed reports that some of the bodies floating downriver are… are... are… coming back to life. If these reports are to be believed, the dead are swimming to shore and walking on the land.

Morning Man: That can't be, News Man. It just can't be. I have some people buried up there. Wait. I understand we have a caller on the line with a similar story. Caller, are you there?

Caller: Yes, I am here.

Morning Man: Please tell us your name and why you're calling.

Caller: My name is Randall. Randall B. Frank. I am calling because it's like News Man there says. Seen it for myself. First the river changed color from gray to a chocolate color and the smell was something awful. And a few minutes later, they started coming out. Covered in mud or

what have you, the corpses just came out of the water. They just stood there for a while, gathered in a circle, and then they started heading in the direction of Cherry Hill.

Morning Man: Cherry Hill, you say? That's where we are. How many are there, Randall? What else can you tell us?

Caller: Never was too good at 'rithmetic, but I would say at least 50. And more all the time. The others wait around and when there's a group of 'em, they head off in some direction or another. They don't seem the same as you and me. Slower. Not sure how much of their minds are still there.

News Man: Morning Man, I've got university professor George Mason on the line. Professor, can you tell us what you know?

Professor: I don't know much. You called me. I can tell you that George Mason is the name of the university. My name is LaFontaine. Dr. Franz LaFontaine.

News Man: Dr. LaFontaine then. Doctor, what do you think is causing the dead to come back to life down here on the Cookoochu River?

Professor: I have no idea. I do not even know for a fact that any such thing is taking place.

Morning Man: Morning Man here, doctor. Do you think it could have something to do with all that raw sewage spilling into the river and mixing with the corpses?

Professor: I would not rule it in or out. I would first need to collect evidence.

Morning Man: Thank you, professor. And thank you, Randall.

News Man: Morning Man, we now have a report from Reporter Man. Reporter Man, what can to tell us? Go ahead, Reporter Man.

Reporter Man: Thank you, News Man. This is Reporter Man reporting for WZHIT News live and direct from the rain- and sewage-swollen Cookoochu River. I can tell you, News Man, that the dead indeed seem to be returning to life. A large group of these, these creatures has blocked off the road I was on. I am now getting out of the WZHIT News Van and walking up to meet them. See if I can get some interviews.

Morning Man: Watch yourself out there, Reporter Man.

Reporter Man: Thanks for your concern, Morning Man. But they don't seem to be dangerous. Let's see if I can get them to say something for you.

Sir, how does it feel to be alive again? Where are you heading? What's your purpose here today?

Unidentified Garbled Voice: Questions. Questions. More questions than worms.

Reporter Man: Ma'am, what can you tell us? How does it feel to— Hey! Let go of my arm! No, no, no! They've surrounded me, Morning Man. Oh, the smell. Save yourselves. Save your—

News Man: Reporter Man. Are you there, Reporter Man? Reporter Man?

Unidentified Voices: Reporter Man have no more questions. Or arms. Or legs. Or—

News Man: Reporter Man!

Morning Man: News Man, you keep trying to reach Reporter Man. We go now to a caller right outside the studios of WZHIT. Go ahead, caller.

Caller: Hi. My name is Rachel Eldridge. These dead things are heading right toward you. Toward me. I'm getting out of here! I suggest you do the same.

Morning Man: Rachel? Are you there, Rachel?

[Sound of loud pounding.]

News Man: Did you here that, Morning Man?

Morning Man: Sounds like it's coming from out front.

News Man: I'm gonna go take a look.

Morning Man: Keep me posted, News Man. In the meantime, let's do a quick recap for those of you just tuning in. We have reports, confirmed now, that dead bodies floating on the Cookoochu River have come back to life and are now roaming the hills west of what used to be Claymoresville. These *things* seem to be violent. I repeat: they are violent. Use extreme caution. A large group of them appear to be right outside our studios here at WZHIT.

News Man: Morning Man, can you hear me? Are you there, Morning Man?

Morning Man: Go ahead, News Man. Why are you whispering?

News Man: They've broken in, Morning Man. The smell is indescribable. There must be more than 30 of them. And they're heading your way. I'm going to try and— No. They've seen me. Ah! Ah! Aaaah!

Morning Man: News Man? News Man? I see them. I can see News Man now too. They've surrounded him. I can't see him anymore. They're coming down the hall now. Nothing between me and them except a little cheap plywood door and a piece of glass. I seem to be up that WZHIT creek without a paddle, folks.

I think they see me. I'll try to give you as many details as I can in hopes that it may help someone out there. I wish I could tell you what they want. They seem to be focused on me right now. They are slow. [Sound of glass breaking.] It's been a few years since I ran cross country back at Smith High. Still, I wish this place had a back door.

Maybe I can stand on the desk and climb up there above those tiles. Here goes nothing.

Uugh. Al…most there. No! Let go! They've got my right leg. They're pulling me down.

No! No! Wait. Auntie Esther, is that you? Auntie Esther…

Noooooo!

Not Scary Enough

Mark's dad closed the book.

"All right," he said. "Now it's time for bed."

"That story wasn't scary," Mark groaned. "It was lame."

"Okay," his dad said. "What would you do to make it scary?"

"I would make it bloody," Mark said. "And cut off the boy's head."

His dad was quiet for a time and then nodded in a strange way. Suddenly he started shaking and his skin began to shrivel and peel off. In a few moments his body was a bloody pulp with bones and organs showing through. The thing sitting on the bed wasn't Mark's dad anymore.

It grabbed Mark's terrified face between its hands. Then it laughed and pulled and pulled and pulled until something broke loose. Blood squirted all around the room in great, awesome jets. Something fell and rolled across the floor.

Mark looked back at his headless body and tried to scream.

"Like that?" the thing asked. "Is that better?"

They're Coming For You

They're coming for you.
Oh, wait.
They're already here.
AAAAH!

Unearth the entire *They're Coming For You* collection
wherever eBooks are sold
and
Listen to O. Penn-Coughin read his stories on
The Scary Story Podcast
wherever podcasts are found